

A Pedagogy of Oppression:

The politics of literacy in Brazil, 1971–1989

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by

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Abstract

This thesis provides a historical and philosophical examination of the politics of literacy in Brazil between the years 1971 and 1989. Drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, I examine prevailing conceptions of literacy and illiteracy at that time and the relationship between those conceptions and the distribution of structural power within society. Data were collected variously from government publications and legislation, the proceedings of the National Congress, the reports of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, and articles from the print press. I argue that the military dictatorship provided conditions for the establishment of an effective pedagogy of oppression. Over the 1970s and 1980s, children, teenagers and adults were systematically targeted by anti-dialogical actions that denied their ontological vocation to become more fully human. Non-literates were seen as people without any meaningful culture or knowledge, and even those learning how to read and write faced oppressive practices of false generosity and cultural invasion. Therefore, not only prejudices against non-literates but also functional literacy learning practices worked as instruments to reinforce social injustices and maintain the unequal balance of structural power in Brazilian society.

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Acknowledgments

Since it is always a process, knowing presumes a dialectical situation: not strictly an “I think,” but a “we think.” It is not the “I think” that constitutes the “we think,” but rather the “we think” that makes it possible for me to think.

Paulo Freire

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Preface

A long time ago, there was a girl named Marli. Marli was born into a financially poor family. Her parents were peasants without any land, forced to farm for others as a means of providing for their numerous children. Despite the strenuous conditions of her childhood, she used to dream about becoming a mathematics teacher. Unfortunately, the harsh reality of life gripped her and at only four years of age she left her home with her sister to work. She became a maid in a house full of strangers, taking care of children almost her own age, washing dishes by standing on a bench to reach the tap, and sometimes crying herself to sleep.

Not so long ago, there was a second girl named Marilia. Marilia was also born into a poor family. Her mother worked as a seamstress in a tannery factory while her father wandered between unstable bricklayer jobs. Despite the ups and downs of her household income, with sometimes not even enough money for food, Marilia had countless aspirations for her future. She used to climb up an old mastic tree to read novels and to write poetry. She also used to dream about becoming an astronaut and traveling among the stars. However, these dream were left behind when she started working as a saleswoman in a clothes store when she was fourteen years of age.

More recently, there was a third girl named was Mônica. Mônica was born into a middle-class family. Her parents did not have much money, but she never faced real hunger, not the type of hunger that leaves a person unable to think of anything else besides food. She used to dream about having a life full of adventures, where she would work as a teacher in the morning, as a hair stylist in

the afternoon, and as a flight attendant on the weekend. She was a good student, and made her way through college with most of her cousins. She received scholarships during her undergraduate years that allowed her to focus exclusively on research activities, and this financial support helped her to pursue a master's degree. Finally, she was accepted to a Ph.D. programme overseas, in a distant land, with a foreign language.

These stories represent the last three female generations of my family, including myself. They show only a small part of our lives; however, it is clear that I have received numerous opportunities that were denied to my mother and to my grandmother. This is not because I have been luckier or cleverer than them, but because the political, social, and economic conditions in Brazil have changed over the last fifty years. Urbanisation, the reduction of poverty, the expansion of tertiary education, and the empowerment of women are just some of the factors that have produced these changes in Brazil.

I share these stories, not as a way of expressing sorrow at how the dreams of my mother and grandmother were lost in time but to situate myself historically as well as to recognise the privilege of my position and honour those people who did not receive the same opportunities. Although the following pages present an academic examination of the politics of literacy in Brazil, it is impossible to fully separate my personal and family history from this study. I do not pretend to be a 'neutral' researcher. In fact, this investigation is intimately connected to my relationship with Brazil's history and struggles. Consequently, I did not undertake this thesis just for "the sake of studying" and without having anything "to do with that distant, strange world out there" (Freire, 2001, p. 73). Remembering, in the

sense of “*entering a dialogue with the past*,” can challenge the forgetfulness of dominant discourses and practices, disrupt prevailing understandings, and nurture the prospect of a “not yet” reality that, although not possible now, may be in the future (McLaren & Silva, 1993, pp. 75; 77). I hope, then, that remembering the stories of my family here and the stories of those involved in literacy teaching and learning in Brazil later in this thesis will contribute, even if on a small scale, to such a challenge.

Introduction

I remember the exact moment when I was able to read for the first time. I was around five years old, and although I was already attending preschool classes, my grandmother was also giving me lessons at home through an ancient hand-printed primer, which probably belonged to some older child in the family. One morning, I finally deciphered some of the sentences that talked about grapes, a common subject in Brazilian booklets because the word in Portuguese, *uva*, is a simple combination of vowel-consonant-vowel that children can easily master. At lunchtime, when my father arrived home from work, my grandmother promptly ran out of the kitchen proclaiming with a huge smile that I had learned how to read.

I also remember the exact moment when I was allowed to choose one of the adult books from my mother's bookshelf. My mother had, and still has, a small collection of books, mostly novels and thrillers, and I had not been allowed to read any of them because she thought that the contents and language were not suitable for children. I was around ten years old when at last she gave me permission to select one from among the detective novels. I picked up *Crooked House*, by Agatha Christie, and the warm feeling of happiness that filled my heart still returns whenever I open a book.

From the time we wake to the time we close our eyes to sleep, our life is filled with activities connected with reading and writing. We live immersed in a written culture. We flip through magazines while we sit in waiting rooms, we scribble notes to remember to buy bread and eggs on our next trip to the supermarket, we check our phones for messages, and we write endless lists of emails for professional and

personal purposes. These activities are grounded so deeply in our lives that it is easy to forget that our relationship with the written word is uneven, that not everybody has equal access to the world of literacy, and that even today millions of people never have the chance to learn how to read and write.

In Brazil, the lack of literacy is seen as a long-standing social problem. Despite significant government financial investments, legislative initiatives, and the untiring efforts of educators, our students apparently face systematic difficulties when dealing with situations involving reading and writing. Additionally, when the poor results of standardised tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are publicised by the media, as they often have been, teachers, students, and schools suffer a significant loss of social prestige and self-esteem.

This thesis started as a study of the different methodologies and theories involved in teaching children in Brazil how to read and write. Slowly, and after many encounters with the work of Paulo Freire, some filled with great satisfaction and others with uncertainty and confusion, I found the thesis becoming something else. Instead of a study about methodologies it has become a historical and philosophical study of the politics of literacy in Brazil. I have investigated prevailing conceptions of literacy, and consequently of illiteracy, in the proceedings of the National Congress and the print media between the years 1971 and 1989 in an attempt to understand the “reason of being” (Freire, 2000, p. 45) of those conceptions and how they are connected to wider aspects of the Brazilian political system and culture.

The change of focus in the research happened not only because of my closeness to Freire’s theories but also because of present conditions in Brazil. In

2015, Brazil's fragile democracy suffered yet another coup, this time a legislative-judiciary one. The right of the people to high-quality, free-of-charge public education, as well as the right of teachers to their didactic autonomy, are once more under threat, this time from a rising neoliberal-conservative movement. Therefore, to safeguard these rights, it is necessary to reaffirm the political nature of education and literacy, especially considering that the political dimension of literacy has been continuously overlooked in favour of linguistic approaches in recent years (Peres, in press).

A historical inquiry is also important because by examining “the oppression and pain endured” in the past it is possible to assess “not only the sources of suffering that need to be remembered so as not to be repeated, but also the subjective side of human struggle and hope” (Giroux, 1987, p. 16). The period covered by the research starts in 1971, with the establishment of a new Law of Directives and Bases of National Education during the military dictatorship, and ends in 1989, with the run-up to the first direct election for president since the coup of 1964. There is an extensive body of literature about education (Cunha & Góes, 1991; Ferreira Jr. & Bittar, 2008; Gaio, 2008; Lira, 2010; J. M. Pinto, 2014), teachers' working conditions (Ferreira Jr. & Bittar, 2006; Ramos & Stampa, 2016; Salles & Stampa, 2016), and literacy (M. G. Barbosa, 2014; L. K. Gomes, 2012; Klein, 2000; Mortatti, 2000; Paiva, 1981, 1982; A. R. Santos, 2015; L. R. Santos, 2014; B. N. Souza, 2016) during the military regime¹. My work draws upon this material as well as upon various primary sources to provide a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the political dimensions of literacy in Brazil.

¹ All quotations of documents and literature in Portuguese were translated by the author unless stated otherwise.

I consider myself as operating in the tradition of critical educational studies, assuming my responsibility in the fight for social justice. Understanding research as a possible “form of activism,” I agree with Gordon and Mutch’s idea that “there would be little sense in undertaking research were there not a core belief that the world can become a better place – for us and for others” (2006, p. 21). Additionally, as Webster (2016) argues, “researchers of education should consider their research as being *educational* rather than merely informative and especially so if the world is to be changed and improved and not merely interpreted” (2016, p. 6). This challenge demands that researchers move away from the notion of simply *having* research outputs to one of *being* caring researchers (Webster, 2016).

This research is committed to the notion of changing reality and not just interpreting it. I do this not in a romantic or naive way, but in the spirit of Freire’s idea of untested feasibility (Freire, 2016). Freire believed, as I do, that in the act of observing, comprehending and denouncing an unjust situation, we can also announce a different future and work towards this dream. For this purpose, I have chosen to couch this thesis in language free of euphemism, employing, for example, terms such as *oppression* and *liberation* instead of *marginalisation* and *enfranchisement* when speaking of power relationships. This approach has often been regarded as out-dated, especially since the advent of postmodern sensibilities, and I fully understand that using such language involves certain risks, including that of falling into a binarism of oppressor and oppressed, powerful and powerless, that can diminish the complexity of reality, as pertinently pointed out by Giroux (1993). However, for me, my choice of wording is a political and ethical decision made in order to avoid minimising the material day-to-day existence of

those involved in the politics of literacy that I am analysing.

Starting from a Freirean theoretical framework (Freire, 1970/2005, 1974/2013, 1996/2016, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2014, 2016), this study examines the proceedings of the National Congress and the print media to analyse the politics of literacy in Brazil during the military dictatorship. The *politics of literacy* is understood here as a “distinctive field of inquiry” (Lankshear & Lawer, 1987, p. 12). In this perspective, politics is neither exclusively a state-related sphere of action nor a field connected to all dynamics of power and conflict. Rather, it refers to the “operation and exercise of structural power (...) within the context of people pursuing their interests, goals and aspirations” (p. 28). More specifically, the politics of literacy are related to the ways in which reading and writing are taught and used to either reinforce or resist structural patterns of power (Lankshear & Lawer, 1987). To analyse the politics of literacy in Brazil, I consulted the following sources: the Official Gazettes of the Federal Senate; the Official Gazettes of the Joint Sessions between the Federal Senate and the Chamber of Deputies; other related government documents and legislation; the annual reports of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics; and articles from the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper and *Veja* magazine.

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. It begins with the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research, proceeds from there to a discussion of the historical background of Brazil, and finishes with an analysis of the politics of literacy in Brazil between the years of 1971 and 1989. Chapter One is devoted to the theoretical framework of the research. I examine Paulo Freire’s theory of oppression and liberation and some of its dissenting critiques.

Additionally, I articulate some of the ways in which Freire's writings can contribute to the current debate about education, dialogue, and hope. Chapter Two describes the methodological approach adopted. I discuss Freire's thoughts on curiosity and intellectual discipline and the development of literacy as an investigative field. Following that, I explain the process of data collection and organisation, outlining the particularities of each type of document employed.

Chapter Three presents an overview of the history of Brazil from the proclamation of the republic in 1889 until the first years of the military government. I emphasise the broad tendency within society to employ authoritarian methods as a way to seize and maintain power in Brazil. I also address the most significant efforts of the time to expand literacy learning. Chapter Four explores the cultural and educational context in Brazil after the coup. First, I highlight the changes in the Ministry of Education and Culture, many of which undertaken under the influence of human-capital theory. Second, I bring to light the curriculum reform of elementary and secondary education in 1971. Finally, I consider the working conditions of teachers during the military regime.

Chapter Five discusses literacy in the face of social oppression. Initially, it examines the statistical data about literacy from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1970s. I show how literacy levels were unevenly spread across the country, with large disparities depending on region, zone, race, and gender. Then, I evaluate the psychological approach of Manoel Lourenço Filho and Ana Maria Poppovic to literacy learning. Chapter Six investigates the *Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização* - MOBRAL (Brazilian Literacy Movement) in terms of its structure, advertising strategies, and conditions of the classrooms. It also illustrates the controversies that

broke out between MOBRAL and both the Senate and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

Finally, Chapter Seven continues the historical overview, taking the story from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. This completes the background fabric for an analysis of the process of dehumanisation of those without reading and writing abilities that has existed in Brazil since the 19th century, and sets the more specific context for a discussion of the debate that occurred during final years of the military dictatorship over whether non-literate people should be granted the right to vote and to be elected.

Chapter 1

Developing my theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical, political and ethical framework that I have employed in my research on literacy in Brazil. It is organised into four sections. First, I situate myself and my research in our temporal and geographic contexts. I then discuss Paulo Freire's theory of oppression and liberation and the views of some of his critics. Following this, I develop a socio-political view of education, focusing specifically on the Freirean concept of dialogue. Finally, I argue in favour of hope and solidarity in a post-truth world.

1.1 Situating the researcher and the research in time and space

At a conference in Iowa in 1996, Freire (2014) stated that he did not desire followers; on the contrary, he urged for a critical reinvention of his work in new and varied contexts. To engage in this difficult but exciting challenge, I need first to talk about the political, cultural and historical conditions that shaped me and this thesis, considering that, as Freire said on another occasion, "the more I acknowledge my own process and attitudes and perceive the reasons behind these, the more I am capable of changing and advancing from the stage of ingenuous curiosity to epistemological curiosity" (Freire, 2001, p. 43).

This section therefore is a double effort, one of being conscious of myself and another of being conscious of the world around me. I was born in 1990 and

spent my childhood under the mantle of neoliberal policies² in Brazil. I took tests in school about the effects of globalisation and the benefits of an integrated economy. I watched TV reports about the privatisation of state-owned companies and about high unemployment rates. However, I did not grow up with a fatalistic approach to life. There was hope, the general feeling was that things were about to improve, that change would finally happen in Brazil. Looking back, I can see this optimism connected with a trend of political transformation at local and national levels. In 2000, for example, I went with my father to a street celebration in Pelotas, a medium-size city in the south of Rio Grande do Sul: the streets were crowded with people carrying red flags because for the first time a member of the Workers' Party had been elected mayor of the city.

Two years later, in 2002, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, the former metalworker and union representative who had already run for president three times on the Workers' Party ticket and lost, was finally elected. His image as a hard-line leader had to be downplayed during the campaign, and his radical proposals softened. The argument that he lacked administrative experience had been countered by his having available a team of qualified supporters. Finally, the choice of a high-profile businessman as vice-president had quietened the doubts about the interruption of on-going economic reforms (Figueiredo & Coutinho, 2003). Despite these changes, however, the rise of the Workers' Party to the presidency generated even greater

² Olssen and Peters (2005, pp. 314-315) argue that neoliberalism is a "politically imposed discourse" based on the premises of "the self-interested individual" and "free market economics," and on a commitment to the principles of both "*laissez-faire*" and "free trade." When put in motion, however, the general principles of neoliberalism are translated to particular and local configurations (Perreault & Martin, 2005). Latin America served as a testing ground for such experiments. The first of these was in Chile, during the authoritarian regime of Augusto Pinochet, where neoliberal economic reforms were implemented and the voices of opposing groups were silenced. Later, similar reforms throughout the region, encouraged by multilateral organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), led to the deregulation of state economies and the reconfiguration of the state's role in society (Perreault & Martin, 2005).

optimistic expectations of change in favour of social justice. There was some division within the government as to whether targeted or universal programmes would be more effective. Ultimately the former won out, and efforts to fight specific problems like hunger and poverty prevailed (Fagnani, 2011). The main programme, *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance) that provided financial aid to low-income families, was successfully implemented across the country.

Unfortunately, the party ultimately decided that maintaining broad support for the Government was the priority at the expense of some of the ideals that it had campaigned on during the elections (Leher, 2006). It abandoned its more revolutionary policies such as structural land reform, and even expelled those more radical members who became dissatisfied with the government back-peddalling (Leher, 2006). Three years later, in 2005, newspapers and magazines were flooded with stories about a large corruption scandal over monthly side-payments made by the Workers' Party to public servants and parliamentarians. The scandal involved Lula's most powerful colleagues. Nevertheless, the President was able to remain relatively unaffected, being eventually re-elected in 2006.

In his second term the administration sought to return to its ideals of social justice by encouraging the growth of the domestic economy to benefit all sectors of society including the working class. Lula put in place the *Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento* (Growth Acceleration Programme), which focused on infrastructure works, and the *Programa Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (My House, My Life Programme), which provided low-interest financing for new and used low-cost houses (Fagnani, 2011). According to Jardim (2009), programmes like these constituted a sincere effort by the government to “domesticate” capitalism in the sense of enfranchising

the population by allowing a greater participation in the market.

In the 2010 presidential election, the first I was able to vote in, Lula's political heir, Dilma Rousseff, an economist who had been involved in the struggle against the military dictatorship, won the office. Despite initial optimism about her presidency, the Brazilian economy, which had previously enjoyed high commodity prices in the 2000s, started to weaken. The unimpressive growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2013 triggered a wave of disapproval in international newspapers and agencies such as the *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The voices preaching market and tax system 'reform' regained strength in the country (Contri, 2014).

At the same time a new political left, with the aim of greater horizontal participation in government, initiated protests that were organised mainly through the Internet and social media, much as the Occupy Wall Street and Arab Spring movements elsewhere had been (Singer, 2013). The first demonstrations, organised by the *Movimento Passe Livre* (Free Pass Movement), targeted rises in bus fares in the city of São Paulo in the first week of June of 2013. The marches covered the city's major streets, and the disproportionate force employed by the police caused a national uproar (Singer, 2013).

Also in June, Brazil hosted the Confederations Cup of the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA) as a preparation for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. In a country of football enthusiasts, the general population was initially euphoric. Gradually, however, people became disillusioned with the Cup. The vast amount of public expenditure involved in hosting the event, together with the

government's failure to deliver on promised urban transport improvements, heightened overall discontent with the political situation nationwide.

The demonstrations, initially located in São Paulo, spread to other cities and the number of participants increased, especially in the Confederations Cup host cities of Belo Horizonte, Brasília, Fortaleza, Recife, Rio de Janeiro and Salvador. The demonstrations also widened demographically to encompass both left-wing and right-wing extremists. Conservatives used the fight against corruption to attack the President. Middle-class citizens, on the other hand, saw the demonstrations as an escape valve over the very real fear of a return to high inflation, while working class youth complained about their exclusion from the Cup because of high-ticket prices (Singer, 2013). By the end of the month, however, the demonstrations had lost their focus energy and disintegrated into diffuse demands for improvements in public services across the board, and consequently broke apart (M. R. Silva & Pires, 2013, Singer, 2013).

In the following year, there occurred the tightest presidential election since re-democratisation. The incumbent, Rousseff, defeated Aécio Neves in the second round with a slight majority of 51.64% of the valid votes (Brasil, 2014). Despite the victory and inauguration of a new term, Rousseff's popularity faced a sharp drop in 2015, mainly because of the fiscal adjustments she had instituted to combat inflation. Furthermore, a new corruption case, this time at Petrobras, the largest state-owned company, undermined Rousseff's credibility and started a renewed flow of protests. The government saw the protests simply as the opposition's refusal to accept their fourth defeat at the polls and attempt to press for an unprecedented third round of elections. For the opposition, the demonstrations

were an opportunity to reinforce calls for neoliberal reforms and further erode the already weak popular support of the government. At this point, I was applying for my PhD. programme in New Zealand.

In the following months, there was a sharp increase of intolerance and hate speech on the Internet from both the right and the left. In August 2016, Rousseff, the first Brazilian female president, lost her mandate in a parliamentary vote overseen by the Supreme Court. The government that followed, with President Michel Temer at its head, adopted a reactionary position, pushing for fast reforms in numerous fields, including social security benefits, workers rights, educational curricula, and the demarcation of indigenous lands, among others. There is an obvious comparison to be made between Dilma Rousseff's downfall and that of João Goulart: both were removed from office by a coup. My disappointment and anger at witnessing, although from a distance, what was in essence another coup helped fuel this research. My acknowledgement of this fact, however, does not imply that, while writing this thesis, I was either less critical of Brazil's uneven history than I would be otherwise, or less hopeful of Brazil's future.

1.2 *Oppression and liberation* – still helpful terms?

It has been more than 40 years since the publication of the first edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's most famous and most referenced book; and it has been more than 20 years since Freire passed away. Recently, his work, which has never been without its critics, is going through one more wave of severe public disapproval in Brazil. It is easy to find people affirming online that Freire, through "Marxist indoctrination," implemented a "class struggle" in Brazilian schools (Viana, 2015); or that he had a "cruel and inhumane project" with a close alignment to

“tyrannical regimes” (Streit, 2015). To those familiar with his work, however, it is apparent that the authors of those claims have a restricted knowledge of Freire’s writings. This does not mean, however, that his theories are free of weaknesses. Still, I believe that his work, reframed to help us understand our current research and praxis, remains relevant.

Over the years, Freire developed a language to understand and criticise forms of oppression (Freire, 1970/2005, 1996/2016, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2014, 2016). For him, everyone has a right to become more fully human, to name the world and to take action in order to transform it. The distortion of this ontological human vocation, by whatever means, leads to the dehumanisation of the oppressed as well as the oppressors. As Freire commented, “I cannot be if others are not; above all, I cannot be if I forbid others from being” (Freire, 2000, p. 59). In oppressive situations, people are transformed into objects, as things waiting to be conquered and controlled. On the one hand, the oppressors tend to hold an egoistic view wherein their privileges are perceived as inalienable rights. On the other hand, the oppressed often fall into a fatalist sense of history, unintentionally adapting themselves to a situation of exploitation.

As pointed out by Schugurensky (2011), Freire’s theory of oppression has been criticised by intellectuals on both the political left and right for presenting an overly simplistic binary explanation of reality. He was also criticised for holding universal pretensions and offering abstracted examples, which would not provide enough support for those dealing with particular situations (Weiler, 1994, 1996). Additionally, in Jackson’s view, Freire did not devote “sufficient concentration to difference, to the conflicting needs of oppressed groups or the specificity of

people's lives and experience" (1997, p. 464). Finally, Freire was also accused of being too vague and not clearly stating who the oppressed actually were (Schugurensky, 2011). I will address some of the critiques of Freire's work, focusing mainly on the issues involving the concepts of class, gender, and race.

In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire (2016) observed that he was doubly criticised for his use of the concept of class, first, in his early years, by some of his Marxist readers, for not mentioning class struggle enough, and again, in his later years, by some postmodern thinkers, for even mentioning class at all. This change in the perception of Freire's use of class can be linked to more extensive social and political shift worldwide. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, class struggle seemed as the main answer for the creation of more just societies. However, in subsequent decades, and especially after the fall of communist rule in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, class came to be regarded as a mere theoretical invention after all (Mészáros, 2005).

I recognise that 'class' is a problematic concept, but to entirely dismiss class analysis as an antiquated perspective seems mistaken to me. I understand the term *class*, as Weis does, to denote an "organizer of social experiences," connected primarily to economic conditions, that helps to frame, among other things, "the foods we eat; whether we have orthodontically straightened teeth; [and] where (and if) our children go to school" (Weis, 2009, p. 415). Additionally, class is related not only to "income" levels and "lifestyle" choices but also to the "textures of social power" that define people's control over their lives and work conditions (Zweig, 2012, p. 3).

During the 1970s, Freire focused his analysis on the material conditions of

class exploitation and the effects of domination on the consciousness of the economically oppressed (Freire, 1970/2005; 1974/2013). Later, however, he acknowledged that issues related to class and wealth distribution, despite being crucial aspects of the dynamics of oppression, could not be taken as a complete explanation of oppressive forces in society (Freire, 2016). In fact, he positioned himself against all forms of oppression, stating, for example, that “preconceptions of race, class, or sex offend the essence of human dignity and constitute a radical negation of democracy” (Freire, 2001, p. 41). He failed, however, to go on to develop in-depth discussions about gender and race oppression (Mayo, 1999, McLaren & Silva, 1993; Roberts, 2000). Additionally, as Mayo (1999) points out, despite having published several “conversation books” about education, “Freire did not engage, in a publication of this kind, with either a woman or a person of colour” (p. 116).

Many scholars have pointed out the limitations of Freire’s ideas regarding gender relations (J. A. Barbosa, 2017; hooks, 1993; Jackson, 1997; Weiler, 1994, 1996, 2001). He has been criticised for having a “male frame of reference” (Jackson, 1997, p. 163), and for presenting a “phallocentric paradigm” (hooks, 1993, p. 148). Some of his texts, for example, present sexist language that considers the male perspective as the universal and the female as the particular (J. A. Barbosa, 2017, p. 40). This is especially true for his first publications, including his most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

The more recent editions of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in English present a shift in the language employed, replacing in some cases the word *men* as the plural for human beings with *men and women*. According to the publisher, this

was done to follow recent changes in “attitudes and beliefs” and “to reflect the connection between liberation and inclusive language” (Publisher’s Foreword, Freire, 1970/2005, p. 9). Weiler (2001, pp. 78-79) explains that “the rewriting of Freire’s language subtly changes our understanding of Freire’s intent and of the reception of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* at the time, the way it may have been read by women and men, how it may have shaped the understandings and actions of men and women in political movements in the seventies and eighties.” A case can be made, then, for keeping the original text unchanged in order to preserve *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a historical document produced during the 1960s and published in the 1970s. Additionally, as Freire himself argued, “the incompleteness of the text can be just as important as the completeness in a certain historical moment, for it is incompleteness that engages the reader in a process of continued reinvention of the text in his or her own historical and cultural context” (1997, p. 319).

However, even in Freire’s later books, there were still problems related to the acknowledgment of gender differences (J. A. Barbosa, 2017). In *Teachers as Cultural Workers (Professora sim, Tia não: Cartas a Quem Ousa Ensinar* – in Portuguese), for example, Freire condemned the parenting role that many teachers take upon themselves as an ideological trap that collaborates to devalue the teaching profession. Nevertheless, he was unable to connect the argument of teachers being perceived mainly as ‘aunties’ with the broader context of gender relationships, where work performed by women usually carry lower social status (J. A. Barbosa, 2017, pp. 45-56).

As for racial inequalities, Freire’s work, as well as that of others in the field of

critical pedagogy, has been held accountable for having a “silenced voice of race” (Ladson-Billings, 1997) and for lacking a “critique of whiteness” (Allen, 2004, p. 124). This insufficient attention to the relevance of race in the dynamics of oppression, Allen (2004) believes, can be associated to a privilege of white politics, in which fighting against racial oppression and white supremacy becomes secondary in the wider efforts against oppression. In addition, as Haymes (2002, p. 155) points out, there are some conceptual weaknesses in Freire’s writings about experience, where race (and gender) are portrayed as particular specificities of one’s life while class remains as a transcendental category.

In general, Freire held an open posture and welcomed respectful discussion of positions that differ from his own (Freire, 1997; Freire & Macedo, 1993, 1995). He sincerely engaged in what Lorde (1984, p. 115) defines as a “lifetime pursuit” of extracting “distortions” – classism, elitism, sexism, heterosexism, racism, ageism – from our lives. He made efforts to listen to and learn from his critics, by, for example, changing the language of his later books to a non-sexist tone. He once acknowledged the presence of a *machista* tendency in his consciousness when, sharing his struggles in overcoming this perverse part of Brazilian culture, he admitted to having felt embarrassed in the past to walk hand-in-hand with another man (Freire, 1994). Despite such efforts, he remained a man of his time and place. As Aronowitz (1993, p. 23) explains, “for like the rest of us, Freire is obliged to work within his own historicity.” A critical reading of his texts is a matter, then, of understanding Freire as an unfinished being, unperfected, hindered by his own personal, temporal and geographic limitations.

In my view, Freire’s definition of oppression does not comprise a generic

concept but offers an analytical tool for understanding concrete situations, ones located in time and space and grounded in experience. He recognised the shifting roles one can play in different dynamics of oppression. On the one hand, it is important to perceive both how the different social markers that position one in society — class, gender, race, ethnicity and disabilities, among others — are interwoven together and how, through contexts of value and meaning, they help to define one's access to resources and establish one's identity (Scott, 1987; Ortner, 1998; Reay, 2009; Weis, 2009). On the other hand, however, is also necessary to affirm that “there are certain features all oppressed groups have in common which transcend the particularities of their specific oppressive situations,” for in this way can we “make sense [of the particular and local] in relation to some larger conception of oppression and liberation” (Roberts, 2000, p. 110).

The role of ideology is also a relevant aspect of the discussion about oppression. Freire (2001) argues that every statement we make, oral or written, is made for or against something; thus, all forms of communication are permeated by ideologies. Nonetheless, for him, becoming aware of the persuasive power of ideologies is complicated because our perceptions of reality are affected by our beliefs in a way similar to those “dewy mornings when the mist distorts the outline of the cypress trees and they became shadows of something we know is there but cannot really define” (Freire, 2001, p. 113).

Despite Freire's suggestive metaphor, it is necessary to arrive at a more precise conceptualisation of ideology. Konder (2002) believes that “ideology” is a concept with one of the largest number of meanings in history. Initially, the concept was associated with the questions of what it is to “know” something and what the

limits of knowledge are. Following Karl Marx's writings about the division of labour and the commodification of life in the 19th century, a more radical definition emerged, one which acknowledged that the ideas of the dominant class become the ideas dominant in society (Konder, 2002). Marx and Engels, for example, argue that "the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production. (...) The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships" (Marx & Engels, 1970/2001, p. 92). Thus, ideology, from Marx's point of view, both prevents questions about the way society works and hinders people's apprehension of the connections between ideas and the shifting nature of ideas over time (Konder, 2002).

In the last century and a half, many others, such as György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, Louis Althusser and Jürgen Habermas, have developed their own interpretations of the links between ideology, power and consciousness (Konder, 2002; Hawkes, 2003). Critics of ideology-based studies have highlighted the tendency of such scholarship to fall into the realm of economic determinism and/or to hold too tightly to a belief in truth as an absolute rather than as a socially constructed perception. Those studies with deterministic economic views, however, typically present reductionist interpretations of life not because of the use of the concept of ideology itself but because their authors have non-dialectical understandings of how society works. The notion of truth needs to be reassessed in light of the contributions of post-structuralist authors, for example Michel Foucault's analyses of the relationship between power and knowledge, the disputes involved in establishing bodies of knowledge as truths, and the social and historical conditions

of truth-tellers and truth-telling (Besley & Peters, 2007). However, some critics have warned that a total relativisation of truth based on the complete impossibility of comprehending reality must also be avoided (Konder, 2002; Hawkes, 2003).

My own interpretation of ideology is built upon the reflections of Chauí (2016), for whom ideology is a “*corpus* of representations” that organises ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Ideology, therefore, is not something outside of individuals, but is inherent in all of us. To appear logically coherent, however, ideologies are forced to mask their geneeses, forging instead older origins to position themselves as natural and everlasting narratives of reality that nevertheless contain “imaginary universalities” where particular interests are presented as general truths (Chauí, 2016, p. 247).

It is by means of ideology, therefore, that the oppressed embody the oppressors inside themselves. Certain myths, for example, are continuously repeated, such as the belief that everybody is born with the same opportunities and that success is only a matter of effort, or the idea that common people are ignorant and therefore cannot be involved in decision-making processes. It is also by means of ideology that the dreams of the oppressed are often distorted, such that the oppressed sometimes wish to become oppressors themselves rather than look for ways of breaking the cycle of oppression. As Lorde outlines, for Freire, “the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” (Lorde, 1984, p. 123). This piece of the oppressors in the oppressed makes it even harder to recognise unfair and abusive conditions and to unite disparate groups in common cause (Freire, 1970/2005, 2001).

The overcoming of oppressive conditions is in Freire's view connected to a process of *conscientização*, one of the most famous, but often misunderstood, concepts he employed. Conscientisation has been associated with universal fixed stages of consciousness development, and Freire has been criticised for suggesting a type of cultural invasion where the worldview of the oppressed would be replaced with a perspective alien to them (Roberts, 1996a). Additionally, as Findsen (2007) explains, "there has been a distinct tendency to over-simplify the idea of *conscientization* from its historical origins in Brazil and apply it to First World contexts as 'consciousness raising'" (p. 457). Part of this confusion, which tends to reduce *conscientização* to 'consciousness raising,' could be connected with the difficulty of translating Freire's work from Portuguese to English. In Portuguese the term *conscientização* combines morphemes of the words *consciência* (consciousness) and *ação* (action), indicating a clear relationship between thinking and doing, whereas in English the term conscientisation emphasises only the mental process, missing out the practical component present in the original term.

Freire decided to avoid talking about *conscientização* during most part of the 1970s and the 1980s because of the misunderstandings surrounding the term, returning to it only in the 1990s (Freitas, 2008; Mayo, 2004). Although he did use the notions of "magical," "naïve" and "critical" consciousness when talking about peasant worldviews in his early books, I agree with Roberts (1996a, p. 187) that conscientisation in Freire can be seen as a non-hierarchical and "ever-evolving process" of questioning reality. *Conscientização*, then, is closely related to praxis, an integral part of a dialogical movement between reflection and action which involves perceiving the contradictions in one's life, critically reflecting upon this reality and

acting to promote change. In this way, *conscientização* involves, in Torres's words, both "a process of social transformation" and "an invitation to self-learning and self-transformation" (Torres, 2008, p. 08). Finally, *consientização* is also intertwined with the notion of dialogue. As Roberts explains, "the 'I think' is only possible (Freire believes) through a corresponding 'We think'. Thus, to speak of conscientisation as a movement in patterns of thought or behaviour among individuals without tying to this broader shift in collective consciousness is nonsensical from a Freirean point of view" (Roberts, 1996a, p. 191).

Liberation, based on Freire's belief that the fight for a less oppressive society is a collective rather than an individual battle, thus, requires dialogue, cooperation, and faith in the potential of others. Together, it is easier to perceive the contradictions in our lives and push forward the boundaries that limit change. One guiding principle must be that of working *with* others and not *for* others, avoiding either imposing one's own vision or treating others with a paternalistic attitude. Finally, liberation cannot be seen as a finishing line waiting to be crossed or as the golden pot at the end of the rainbow; on the contrary, it presupposes a constant struggle, because in the course of naming and renaming the world new contradictions will surface, and the cycle will continually be restarted.

It is my view that in several ways Freire's considerations about humanisation and dehumanisation are still useful when trying to understand and overcome situations of injustice and violence today. Firstly, even though Freire focused his analysis of oppressive situations on an examination of class, he acknowledged the multilayered nature of oppression and recognised the importance of other factors including race, ethnicity and gender. Secondly, his insistence on the non-existence

of neutral positions made it impossible to ignore the influence of ideology, especially when considering narratives where particular interests are granted the status of universal truths. Thirdly, for him, humanisation is a process and not a fixed or final destination. As Roberts (2000, p. 41) argues, “one can never, on the Freirean view, become *fully* human — one can, at best, become *more* fully human.” Fourthly, liberation, the “concrete manifestation” of humanisation (Roberts, 2016, p. 55), is perceived by Freire as a social act, one of a becoming more fully human through dialogue with others in an explicit rejection of either an authoritarian or a self-centred praxis.

1.3 Education and dialogue

Over the years, Freire developed particular views on ontology and epistemology that were not specifically described in one book, but were advanced throughout the entire body of his work (Romão, 2008). For him, all beings are incomplete and unfinished; however, only human beings are aware of their incomplete and unfinished nature (Romão, 2008). Freire argues that, as human beings, “we are engaged in the constant process of creating and re-creating our own nature. Because of that we really are not, we are becoming” (Freire, 2014, p. 16). In this way, people experience in their daily lives the “tension” between “being” and “being more” (Romão, 2008, p. 8199). Additionally, in Freire’s view, men and women struggle to learn and grow because “hope is an ontological need” (Freire, 2016, p. 2). Hope, therefore, is what drives us to change our realities (Romão, 2008, pp. 8208-8209).

Freire believed that “not knowing is part of knowing” (Freire, 1994, 8:37). It is by recognising one’s own incomplete and unfinished state and by accepting “that

there are some things I know and some things I do not know” that it becomes easier “to know better what I already know and better learn what I do not yet know” (Freire, 2001, p. 120). In addition to the hope that we can learn, therefore, the learning process demands humility and openness. Learning, from a Freirean point of view, also needs to be understood as an interactive and dialogical endeavour, where active subjects transform themselves, others and the world (Becker, 2008). Finally, as Roberts understands Freire’s epistemology, “to know is not to have reached a predetermined destination; rather, it is a manner of ‘traveling’ — a way of being in, and interacting with, the world (through dialogue with others)” (Roberts, 2000, p. 38). Our educability, thus, is grounded in the idea that we are never polished to a final perfect form, but are always in the process of becoming (Freire, 2000, 2001).

The educational process is for Freire “politics, art, and knowing” (Freire, 1985a, p. 17). It is a political enterprise in that it is grounded in the real world and shaped by numerous interests. Education is also art, aesthetics put in motion, which means that it allows for manifold forms of creative expression in the process of human development. Finally, education involves knowing, because it is the embodiment of a theory of knowledge that operates to construct and deconstruct meaning. Education, therefore, cannot be merely a service provided for the purpose of training someone. On the contrary, education is always an intervention in the world where the many stakeholders – teachers, students, parents, policy-makers, the media – all have their own agendas, often based on unconscious dreams and utopias (Freire, 2001).

At different times in his life Freire held three different understandings about

the relationship between education and politics (Freire, in Freire & Shor, 1987). First, as a novice educator he found himself unable to draw meaningful connections between education and politics. Later, he became “less naïve,” realising that education had political aspects (Freire, in Freire & Shor, 1987, pp. 61). This change in thought can be related to a broader transformation in Freire’s use of language, where he moves from talking in terms of personal *liberdade* (freedom) to focusing on collective *libertação* (liberation) (Scocuglia, 2005, p. 26). Finally, Freire believed that “education is politics” (Freire, in Freire & Shor, 1987, pp. 61). This signifies, as Shor explains, that “politics is not *one* aspect of teaching or learning. All forms of education are political.” In this way, politics is present in the relationship between teachers and students, in the process of selecting course content, in the use of standardized tests, in the distribution of funding, in administrative decisions, and in the physical structure of schools, among many other aspects (Shor, 1993, pp. 27-28).

All of these features operate to make education, among other things, both a potential instrument of oppression and a means of liberation, and more often than not a complicated mixture of both possibilities. Regarding schooling in particular, a significant point to recognise is that neither the language employed nor the content selected as being legitimate knowledge is neutral (Apple, 1979/2004). They can, to varying degrees, either privilege the dominant culture (i.e., by reinforcing the contradictions and inequalities found in society) or enhance a counter-hegemonic culture, thus intensifying the battle for equality. Additionally, teachers can be understood as “agents continuously negotiating their place among structures, rationales, norms, symbols, and routines” (O’Cadiz, Wong & Torres, 1998, pp. 3-4).

While analysing the effects of schooling, therefore, it is important to consider that there may be either negative outcomes, such as the homogenisation of students and the perpetuation of social hierarchies, or positive outcomes, like the empowerment of individuals and the increase in political awareness (Basu, 2010).

It was Freire's belief that, since neutrality is an unattainable and even an undesired goal, teachers should disclose their own political position to their students, making clear their ideas, hopes and dreams. A plurality of opinions in learning environments offers students a chance to compare, contrast, evaluate and choose between different points of view, which is of particular importance because it provides them, for example, with "the testimony of the difference [between reactionary and progressive views] and the right to discuss difference" (Freire, 2014, p. 23). Similarly, Darder (2002) argues that schools as spaces of struggle should not avoid dealing with divergent values and expectations, but that these tensions should be included in the curriculum and used to foster critical thinking.

In his classic book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2005) discussed two educational models: banking education and problem-posing education. The former is based on one-way relationships, where the teacher teaches and the students learn. The teacher, the active subject, deposits knowledge in the minds of the students, the passive objects of the action. Learning is based on rote-memorisation, with the content presented in a fragmented format, without any connection between courses (i.e., science and mathematics, history and literature, history and mathematics) or to the wider world. This perspective, according to Freire, serves only to create submissive students and, later in their lives, submissive adults, who are conditioned to accept their position in society without contesting

their unfavourable conditions (Freire, 1970/2005).

Problem-posing education, on the other hand, is based on a dialogical relationship between teacher and students. Dialogue, for Freire, is a point of encounter where people work collaboratively to learn more than they already know. Respect is the cornerstone of dialogue, considering, as he says, that it is impossible to “dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 90). Dialogue also presupposes humility and openness, virtues related to the awareness of our own unfinishedness. In problem-posing education, dialogue is a way of knowing, without impositions or manipulations, where the teacher learns while teaching and the students teach while learning (Freire, 1970/2005; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

From the problem-posing perspective, therefore, the educational process is not about transferring contents but about encouraging the students, as self-motivated agents rather than objects of their teachers’ actions, to become “masters of their own thinking” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 124). It is important, thus, to unite the two “moments” of the “gnosiological cycle,” that of producing new knowledge and that of understanding the body of already existing knowledge. For this purpose, teaching and learning should, in Freire’s view, be mediated variously by curiosity, critical reflection upon reality, openness to questions about our certainties, and the hope that we can learn more than we already know (Freire, 2004).

In some contexts, the dialogical view of education proposed by Freire has been reduced to a learning methodology, or has even served to sustain a pretence of dialogue filled with empty questions and answers. As Aronowitz (1993, p. 8) explains, the term “‘pedagogy,’ [as defined by Freire] is often interpreted as a

‘teaching’ method rather than a philosophy or a social theory.” This problematic view overlooks the fact that dialogue in Freire is seen as both the condition and the means for teaching and learning, serving the purpose of unpacking reality, of understanding the world and of acting to transform it (Streck, 2014). Furthermore, dialogue in problem-posing education is connected to a “revolutionary mode of praxis” and therefore cannot be isolated from other Freirean concepts such as conscientisation and praxis (Roberts, 2000, p. 56).

As pointed out by Mayo (2000) and Schugurensky (2011), Freire’s argument in favour of a dialogical relationship in education has sometimes been mistaken for a non-directive approach where the teacher is only a facilitator of the learning of the students. Freire was against a licentious perspective, where the spontaneity of “anything goes” becomes the rule in education. He believed that teachers should intervene when necessary and make clear their understanding of the matter at hand. Additionally, for him, it is important to recognise that teachers and students do not occupy equal positions and that to pretend that they do only masks the relation of power in learning environments. Therefore, in his view, “dialogue between teachers and students does not place them on the same footing professionally; but it does mark the democratic position between them” (Freire, 2016, p. 107).

Regarding discipline in the classroom, Freire argued for a balance between freedom and authority. For him, “freedom invented authority in order for freedom to continue to exist. Because without limits freedom cannot succeed, freedom loses itself” (Freire, 2014, p. 22). Authority without freedom becomes authoritarianism, just as freedom without limits becomes licentiousness (Freire, 2001). Roberts (2000)

suggests that authority in Freirean terms can be seen as a precondition to the development of freedom. Harmony between freedom and authority is achieved through the mutual respect of those involved, creating a space for creative and rigorous inquiry about the world around us (Freire, 2001).

One final point that must be addressed is that of the role of love in Freire's theoretical framework. He believed that, when analysing the act of knowing, all emotions — anger, despair, hope, as well as love — should be considered in such a way as to integrate the body, the mind, and the soul. He also supported the idea that teachers should develop a loving attitude towards both their students and the teaching process itself, not in an overly sentimental way but in an affirmative professional manner wherein an “armed love” nourishes the teacher's commitment and responsibilities (Freire, 1985a; 1998). Thus, Darder affirms, Freire saw love as “an intentional spiritual act of consciousness that emerges and matures through our social and material practices, as we work to live, learn, and labor together” (Darder, 2015, p. 49). She further argues that love, in Freire's view, acts both to uphold a position of respect towards difference and to stimulate unity among and despite differences. In this sense, love is a force capable of fostering revolutionary praxes focused on one's becoming more fully human in solidarity with others.

Freire did not ignore the concrete obstacles to the relationship between solidarity and the fight for liberation. He was in fact engaged in discussions of many of them, including the inability of people to recognise their own oppression or give up their privilege as oppressors, the indisposition to dialogue among authoritarian and antidemocratic forms of government, and the cruel effects of neoliberalism in reducing people to the role of mere consumers. Throughout his latest books, for

example, Freire constantly criticised the perversity of market ethics, where “we are worth just as much as our purchasing power is or may be” and where “profit is to be had without limits, without restrictive conditions for its production” (Freire, 2004, p. 116). In the desperate search for material accumulation fostered by market ethics, profits are reaped only by a few, and the high costs involved in the process, such as environmental devastation and people’s dehumanisation, are spread across the globe (W. F. Oliveira, 2014).

Freire also criticised the intrinsically fatalist nature of neoliberalism, which proclaimed both the end of ideologies and the obsolescence of dreams. He pointed out that “only ideologically can I say that ideology disappeared. The discourse that denies the existence of ideology is, in itself, tremendously ideological” (Freire, 2014, p. 28). He firmly positioned himself against pragmatic discourses that pessimistically considered hunger, unemployment and poverty to be unavoidable characteristics of people’s lives at the turn of the 21st century (Freire, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2014). He did not accept that there was nothing to be done about social injustices and suggested that dreaming, and later acting on those dreams, was an important part of what makes us humans. For him dreaming was “not only a necessary political act” but also “an integral part of the historical-social manner of being a person” (Freire, 2016, p. 81). In Roberts and Freeman-Moir’s words, Freire “conceived of utopia not as an impossibility, not as a place of intellectual and emotional refuge for those unable to cope with the way the world is now, but as a necessity for all human beings” (2013, p. 121). In this way, the “human capacity” to dream was part of Freire’s principles “for resisting the marketisation of everyday life” (Roberts, 2003, p. 462).

Finally, Freire consistently argued that there is no fixed destiny waiting for us; on the contrary, he reaffirmed that both people and societies are always in the process of becoming (Freire, 2000). He suggested, then, that “in place of immobilist fatalism” we should adopt a perspective of “critical optimism” (Freire, 2000, p. 58), recognising that “changing is difficult, but it is possible” (Freire, 2004, p. 62). His work remained hopeful and inspires others even now. Were he alive today, however, he would have one more challenge to consider, one that he would likely not have predicted: the post-truth ethos of today’s society where reality is mixed with fiction in the feeds of newspapers and social media across the globe.

1.4 Hope and utopia in post-truth times³

News cycles now are not only faster than ever before, but the fragmented pieces reported in the media are increasingly fraught with distortions of reality on multiple levels. In the last months of the US election in 2016, for example, “fake news” on Facebook generated a larger number of responses from users than the more reasonable content proffered by the major news organisations (Silverman, 2016). Accused of helping to propagate misleading information, giants in the information technology sector such as Google and Facebook are taking steps to control the spread of false information, including cutting the advertising money paid to websites involved in the propagation of inaccurate content, launching programs aimed at educating their users in spotting fake news, and even tagging stories with “fact-check” stamps (Wakabayashi & Isaac, 2017; Thomas, 2017; Gibbs, 2017).

The misrepresentation of facts is not a new phenomenon in the media, as

³ A version of section 1.4 was published as a collaborative article in the *Revista Brasileira de Alfabetização* (Farrell, Ángel & Vahl, 2017). Permission to reprint has been requested from the publisher and the co-authors.

evidenced by the longstanding tradition of infamous headlines characterising tabloids in the UK and elsewhere. However, its intensity today is without precedent (Bowell, 2017). This increasing tendency to overlook facts in favour of emotional appeals to the public was recognised by Oxford Dictionaries when it selected the term *post-truth*, first used in the early 1990s but now definitive of our time, as the Word of the Year in 2016 (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). One of the pernicious consequences of the post-truth phenomenon is, according to Bowell (2017), that of “normalising wilful disregard” for facts and evidence. The connotation, therefore, is a negative one: *post-*, rather than suggesting a state of progressive advancement, declares instead that the concept of truth is outdated and can be selectively, and at worst unscrupulously, dismissed (Bowell, 2017).

Additionally, the post-truth context has become characterised by the decline of traditional media, especially print media, which have suffered a substantial reduction of funds and personnel. It has become everyday more common to have questionable information replicated by underpaid journalists who lack the necessary time to thoroughly check their facts and have even less time to develop a detailed and critical investigation. Comedian Stephen Colbert noted one manifestation of the relativism of the truth in politics when making an ironic twist on the notion of ‘truthiness’ in reference to the growing use of arguments that feel truthful but are not in fact based on convincing evidence (Payette & Barnes, 2017). In its current form, the post-truth scenario also involves an ethos where the established practice is not advancing different interpretations of the same fact or even misrepresenting a piece of information, but holding a posture of complete disregard for the need to support public statements in the media with credible evidence.

The “murky middle ground” between truth and falsehood inherent in the post-truth ethos can be seen as a sign of change in society’s attitude towards politics and may lead to an erosion of the mutual trust necessary for holding democratic dialogue (Rider, 2017). In this context, it is relevant to raise several important questions. How can we account for our emotions when analysing contradictory facts and shreds of evidence? What is the role of education? Is it still possible, given the increasing amounts of intolerance around the world, to dream of a more fair and humane society? I believe that Freire can help us address these questions.

In Brazil, for example, we have been experiencing for the past five years a battle on the Internet between the “*coxinhas*” (little thighs) and the “*pão com mortadela*” (bread with mortadella). On the one hand, the “*coxinhas*”, a heterogeneous group, supported the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in the name of the fight against corruption. On the other hand, the “*pão com mortadela*”, an equally broad group, saw in the selective persecution of the Workers’ Party by the judiciary and the media an excuse for the opposition to implement a neoliberal approach that would de-prioritise social services. In this emotionally charged quarrel, more often than not, members of both sides seem eager to jump to conclusions and spread information that is clearly unverified only to prove that their point is right and that anybody who thinks differently is wrong.

Arguably, Freire would have criticised this attitude. He believed that emotions are inherent constituents of the self and are essential to the way we see and interpret the world (Freire, 2000). However, he also argued that we must avoid being blinded by irrational sentiments and that we should always cultivate a respectful

and open posture towards others. Roberts, for example, suggests that Freire's project, especially in his later books, was to "develop a critical ideal in which reason, emotion and political commitment would be dynamically intertwined" (Roberts, 2008, p. 102). If this attitude were adopted in Brazil, we would no doubt have a more open, honest and productive dialogue about the country's pressing issues.

With the popularisation of social media, it has become possible for a larger number of voices to join the narrative construction of a fact. In Brazil, for example, traditional news coverage of demonstrations usually focuses on the resulting public inconvenience such as traffic jams and property damage (e.g. broken windows) as a result of the demonstrations. Now, through Facebook and others social media, the demonstrators themselves can create a larger awareness of their demands and post images and videos of the police repression that they face. The plurality of voices on these media, however, does not necessarily equate to greater engagement in a dialogue. There are two main reasons for this. The first has to do with the fact that many information technology companies employ Internet algorithms that continuously reinforce a similar content to that which users have previously accessed. The second is related to users' behaviour itself in social media, where people choose to 'unfollow' those who have a different opinion, and consequently enclose themselves in artificial bubbles, reducing their ability to perceive and think clearly about other points of view.

When reflecting on communication and the media in *Pedagogy of Indignation*, Freire called for "a critical and alert posture" to avoid either adopting a merely passive attitude regarding the content in question or falling unwittingly into

ideological traps (Freire, 2004, p. 95). If he were able, he would most likely encourage us to reflect on the role of education and educators in nurturing such postures in social media. He would probably also argue in favour of the ‘testimony of difference’ and of the importance of establishing bridges for dialogue between those who hold different points of view. Finally, perhaps, he would remind us that as significant as is the discussion about truthiness and post-truth in the media today, we need to balance its relevance with the fact that billions still do not have access to reliable sanitation and power supplies, much less to an Internet connection.

Considering that for Freire (2001, p. 72), as for myself, history is a possibility in the sense that “the world is not finished” but “always in the process of becoming”, I believe that it is paramount to reaffirm his call for hope and solidarity. Freire argued that we can be ethical beings only because we have a choice to be unethical. If one decides to assume this ethical responsibility, it is then helpful to foster a critical optimism that reaffirms one’s right to hope and dream about a less cruel and more humane society. This does not mean, however, that by rejecting a fatalistic perception of the future, one can be free from the material constraints of one’s environment (Freire, 1996/2016, 2004). Liberation for Freire is, as Roberts points out, “a matter both of recognising limits and of understanding possibilities given those limits” (Roberts, 2016, p. 61).

Dreaming and acting to bring about change is easier if we make it a collective effort rather than an individual one. As Darder states “it is certainly humbling to confront our limitations, but to do this effectively we need others in our world with whom to learn, to grow, and to struggle” (Darder, 2002, p. 85). It is urgent, therefore, to strongly encourage virtues such as openness, tolerance and

solidarity. In relation to tolerance, from a Freirean perspective, Roberts argues that it “does *not* mean accepting all views without question; to the contrary, respect for others positively demands that their ideas be open for discussion and debate” (Roberts, 2010, p. 75). Solidarity, in particular, was seen by Freire as an “act of love” that unites people — people who might not agree on everything but who, despite their differences, are able to engage collaboratively in the struggle of becoming more fully human (Freire, 1970/2005). Now, when we are constantly overwhelmed by huge quantities of content in the media, much of it specially designed to foment dissent and intolerance, it is more than ever necessary to accept that as long as we respect the autonomy of others and recognise dialogue as a ‘point of encounter’, we can have, as Freire says, a “different understanding of the profile of the dream” and still work together (Freire, 2014, p. 63).

1.5 Conclusion

Freire spent his life “rewriting the ‘same book’” from different angles (Torres, Gutierrez, Romão, Gadotti & Garcia, 2001, p. ix), trying to understand the processes of oppression in society and the role that education could play in creating a more just and fair future for all. He positioned himself against deterministic views, believing that history is being built in the concrete conditions of the present, in the here and now, and that humanisation and dehumanisation are equally possible outcomes. Thus, neither oppression nor liberation can be seen as inevitable. In this way, he urged us to abandon a passive and sometimes fatalistic attitude about the world and assume our responsibilities as subjects in our own histories. Freire’s work is not without its flaws, as has been pointed out in this chapter. However, its limitations can be seen as an invitation to expand his explorations and reinvent the

praxis of old and new themes. Finally, the genuine hope that Freire held throughout his life serves as an example of how is it possible to maintain a posture of critical optimism even in the darkest times.

Chapter 2

Constructing the pathway to the research findings

This chapter explains the methodological foundations of my study. First, I examine Paulo Freire's reflections on curiosity and intellectual discipline as guiding principles to the development of authentic knowledge about the world. Second, I discuss literacy as an investigative field and some important myths and controversies associated with the use of the term *literacy*. Following this, I address the potentialities, limitations and risks involved in archival research. Finally, I make "the invisible work of historical research visible" (L'Eplattenier, 2009, p. 69), describing my methods of data collection and the particularities of each type of source document used in this study.

2.1 Curiosity and knowledge

This thesis is constructed in consonance with Freire's ideas of progressive education, wherein the purpose of education is to become more fully human. However, in addition to applying Freire's social theory to understand my object of study – the politics of literacy in Brazil between the years 1971 and 1989 – I am also using his reflections on epistemology to better understand my own process of knowing. In this sense, I am dialoguing with Freire while I build myself as an educator and as a researcher, and I am also dialoguing with Freire when I commit to my historicity in the world, not as a mere object of history but as subject capable of fighting for different outcomes.

For Freire (2000, 2001), the process of knowing starts with curiosity, the desire to know more about something. Through intellectual discipline it is possible to move from a spontaneous and sometimes ingenuous view to a more epistemological approach to curiosity. The search for knowledge itself is filled with choices and calculated-risk decisions, where persistence and humility should prevent us from being overly confident in our own certainties. Also, a rigorous investigator seeks critical perspectives both of reality and of his or her own role as a researcher. The quest for rigour, however, does not need to exclude beauty, for serious writing is not synonymous with dull writing (Freire, 2000, 2001).

The act of circumambulating an object and looking for its *raison d'être* is permeated by observations, hunches, and, inevitably, errors. In an effort to draw connections between aspects that are only apparently disconnected, one must move beyond a descriptive level to a more sophisticated understanding of the object (Freire, 2000). It is by comprehending why something exists that one can also answer, for example, why a certain policy was implemented, for what purpose, in favour of whom, and, equally important, against whom (Freire, 2004). In this sense, the initial fragmented consciousness of an object's existence is gradually transformed into critical and epistemological knowledge of the object and its relations to the world (Freire, 1996/2016).

Finally, all knowledge is historical and, therefore, provisional. What is considered a commonsense truth today may not be regarded in the same way in a couple of years. Freire recommended against being too certain of our certainties. However, his suggestion was counterbalanced by a cautious rejection of any relativistic perspective where all the interpretations of the truth hold the same value

(Freire, 2001). For him, serious reflection on reality involved critical thinking and an effort to connect the 'reading of the word,' both literally and metaphorically, with the 'reading of the world'. Additionally, he urged us to pay attention to the fact that neutrality is an impossibility and that in the act of choosing or even in not choosing we are inevitably aligning ourselves with something or someone.

2.2 Literacy as an investigative field

The definition of the term *literacy* is "socially contested" wherein the meaning shifts dramatically depending on the speaker's beliefs and intentions (Gee, 2008). Competing views about literacy each struggle to legitimise a set of values about the type of knowledge which is considered most relevant in relation to reading and writing activities (Snyder, 2008). Additionally, the controversies involving the definition and goals of literacy are not restricted to academic discourse but are related to broader social concerns (Snyder, 2008).

Until the 1980s, the prevailing assumptions about literacy in Western academic literature made for a close connection between reading and writing abilities on the one hand, and personal and economic development on the other. Nevertheless, these certainties about literacy, as Graff (1987, 1993) has shown, collapsed when the concept of literacy was historicised in the late 80s and early 90s. The idea of what it was to be literate was no longer independent of time and space. Also, the consequences of learning how to read and write were questioned at individual and collective levels. Thus, the rise in literacy rates could no longer be taken as a sign of material progress or of greater welfare (Graff, 1987, 1993).

Among the literacy misconceptions, Lankshear and Lawler (1987) have pointed out three. First is the perception of literacy as a universal skill or technology,

shared equally by all. Second is the widely held belief that reading and writing are neutral processes that are independent of their social-historical contexts. Third, the notion of literacy has been seen commonly to be an independent variable, at once disengaged from social practices yet also attached to outcomes such as cognitive or economic development (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987).

These common misconceptions are also related to what Street (1984) called “the autonomous model of literacy”. In this approach the development of reading and writing is seen as a milestone that divides societies into those with oral/mythological modes of thinking and those with logical/historical thinking based on written language. In the “autonomous” view, the group using only oral communication would utilise particular thought processes intended to deal with immediate necessities, while the group within the domain of written language would tend to employ abstract thought with superior logic (Street, 1984).

However, for Street (1984), the apparent differences in the ways in which literate and non-literate groups think are due to cultural diversity and convention instead of any disparity in cognitive processes. Street proposed “the ideological model of literacy” to oppose the autonomous model, which he claims, overestimates the consequences of reading and writing. The ideological model moves away from a universal view about literacy to suggest that there are in fact different kinds of literacies. These literacies are shaped to serve specific ideological, cultural, and political purposes. In this sense, reading and writing practices can be understood fully only inside their particular contexts (Street, 1984).

Freire and Macedo (1987) also argue against the purely abstract view of literacy, as distinct from the actual physical and mental practices of reading and

writing. Furthermore, they believed that ‘reading the word’ – to become literate – should be associated with ‘reading the world’. In this process, text and context are connected and must be interpreted through the learner’s experiences. In reading the word/world, it is possible to comprehend one’s own historicity – to name, write, and rewrite the world, with a view to moving towards the reinvention of reality (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Literacy not only emphasises social, economic, and political conditions but also helps to create those same conditions (Welch & Freebody, 1993). In this way, “literacy is both socially constitutive and socially constituted” (Roberts, 1998, p. 60). Thus, the diverse interests supporting literacy policies cannot be ignored. On the contrary, they must be questioned (Welch & Freebody, 1993). In the last decades of the 20th century, for example, claims about a dramatic decrease in literacy standards, mainly in the so-called developed countries, have incited fierce debates worldwide. The idea of a mythical educational past where everything was better has provoked an extensive search for the best way to teach reading and writing. From the “Great Debate” to the “Reading Wars”, these heated disputes have included the mechanics of language, fluency, and semantical abilities, as well as comprehension competencies. In a process surrounded by pressure and anxiety, blaming schools, teachers, and students for the perceived decline in literacy was the easiest choice for many critics (Freebody & Welch, 1993; Welch & Freebody, 1993; Snyder, 2008).

These disputes, mainly focused on finding the ‘right’ methodology for literacy, however, are short-sighted because all programmes work to some extent according to their own objectives (Luke, 1998). It is not a question of method but rather of understanding literacy as a social practice and as a political issue. In this

sense, to concentrate the discussion only on methodologies is a distraction from other factors, particularly the political economy of education. Furthermore, if different literacies have different outcomes then the task of educators becomes one of reconstructing reading and writing practices to take the aspirations and the prior knowledge of the students into account (Luke, 1998).

Considering that “pedagogies always produce specific forms of practical competences – i.e. literacies” (McLaren & Silva, 1993, p. 48), one might ask how the different literacies being produced could be analysed. As a possible framework, Lankshear and Lawler (1987), drawing on Wayne O’Neil’s work, suggest the notions of “proper” and “improper” literacies. For them, “proper literacy enhances people’s control over their lives and their capacity for dealing rationally with decisions by enabling them to identify, understand, and act to transform, social relations and practices in which power is structured unequally” (p. 74). Improper literacy, on the other hand, “either fails to promote, or else actively impedes, such understanding and action” (p. 74). Lankshear and Lawler’s view reinforces, then, the political meaning of literacy.

Closely aligned with the notion of proper literacy proposed by Lankshear and Lawler is the concept of critical literacy, which has been developed variously in the fields of neo-Marxism, post-modernism, and post-structuralism (Roberts, 1996b). Paulo Freire’s work is also an important part of this discussion, with his name being almost “synonymous” with the concept (Mayo, 2004, p. 25). Mayo, arguing that praxis “lies at the heart of Paulo Freire’s notion of critical literacy” (p. 45), calls attention to the importance of reflecting about the word/world as a means of both understanding the contradictions in one’s life and working to change reality. In

addition to praxis, Roberts (1996b) suggests that critical reading of texts and contexts is a key aspect of a Freirean view. Mechanistic perspectives are criticised, with learners being encouraged to become subjects of their own learning through the adoption of curious and critical approaches (Roberts, 1996b). Critical literacy, then, relates not only to specific reading and writing practices but also to a profound “way of being in (and with) the world” (Roberts, 2000, p. 95).

2.3 Working in the archives

Historical research helps, as Graff says, to understand “what has been, what might have been, and what might be: choice, agency, and possibility, in their fullness and their limits” (Graff, 2011, p. 15). This study used documents to identify and analyse the politics of literacy in Brazil during the military dictatorship. To this end, I examined: legislative procedures from the National Congress; censuses from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics; federal legislation; government documents; and press articles with a national circulation.

Long working hours spent in archives, whether physical or digital ones, entail solitary and repetitive tasks such as reading documents, writing references, reproducing quotations, and assembling tables. These activities, sometimes mundane and tedious, are all performed in the effort to make sense of the past. Months and even years are given over to looking through piles of old paper for patterns, discontinuities, and sometimes ‘the unexpected.’ However banal these activities may be, they are, as Farge (2013) explains, responsible for enhancing creativity and for allowing the emergence of new knowledge about the past.

Working in archives, however, is also a fascinating activity that helps to create the strong impression of bringing the past alive. As pointed out by Farge

(2013, pp. 7-8), the archive “gives rise to the naive but profound feeling of tearing away a veil, of crossing through the opaqueness of knowledge and, as if after a long and uncertain voyage, finally gaining access to the essence of beings and things”. Despite this feeling, archival documents are reference points and they do not provide definitive proof from another time. Only when interpreted through the filter of specific topics or questions can they help to build a coherent narrative about reality (Farge, 2013).

The process of producing a historical narrative is a craft where myriad fragments from the past are collected, organised and reorganised to establish relationships between texts and contexts. The choice of a particular historical source, a special lens to the past, intrinsically incorporates a research purpose and indicates the researcher’s line of thought. At the same time, each type of document demands a distinct analytical procedure that transcends but does not ignore the classic historiographical questions about those persons who produced the document — questions concerning when, why, and under what conditions.

For the development of a more critical analysis, Le Goff (2003) argues that all documents need to be perceived as being partial and distorted versions of the past because of their relation with power structures. These power structures, he claimed, affect not only the production of the documents but also the paths that ensured their preservation until the present day. In this sense the documents are monuments. They are an effort, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious, of certain people within society to fabricate a representation (Le Goff, 2003).

Finally, there is the question of ethics while undertaking archival research (Tesar, 2014). Researchers working with documents are, in general, exempt from

applying for ethics approval in university committees because they do not deal directly with human participants. However, they face throughout their investigations many ethical challenges such as negotiating access to archives, understanding the rules for document reproduction, determining what sources to pursue, and deciding what data to make public, among others. In this way, working with archives is complex and cannot be considered an ethically or emotionally neutral activity (Tesar, 2014).

2.4 Official documents as research sources

Over the last 250 years, positivist historiographers have sought to construct ‘objective and neutral knowledge’ of the past. From this perspective, historians should remove themselves from the narrative so as to better display their research objectives. After being subjected to a detailed analysis to establish their authenticity, the documents were taken as the true transmitters of knowledge of ‘what really happened’. Proponents of this approach believe that interpretations must be avoided for fear of falling into philosophical speculation.

The traditional definition of a document is rooted in this positivist historiography. The privileged sources to study the great figures and battles of history, which according to this perspective defined the rise and fall of societies, were written documents that originated from official bureaucracy. Written documents produced by the state embodied the notion and ideal of neutrality, and were used as the supreme empirical evidence to compose a narrative as faithful as possible to the past.

Simultaneous to this process of the scientification of history, nation-states ‘employed’ the past to legitimise civic and educational positions. Modern nations

like France, Italy, and Germany, sought to build a common identity and a temporal continuity which led to a search for a romantic origin. The narratives created to inflate such nationalism inspired the establishment of state repositories – libraries, museums, and archives – to preserve national history and memory. These repositories stimulated a “documentary fever” with the compilation and reproduction of an enormous quantity of documents (Tétart, 2000).

Since the twentieth century, new historiographical approaches have expanded the formerly accepted notions of research objectives and sources. In this expansion, the influence of the French *École des Annales*, the British Neo-Marxists, and the Italian *Microstore* have been especially decisive. Advocates of these new approaches have sought a more interpretative view of the past and have forged a deeper relationship with different fields of knowledge such as sociology, geography, psychology, and anthropology. At the same time, official documents have lost their status as vessels of the truth and they have become one of many means by which we might come to understand the past. Literary books, paintings, photographs, magazines, and oral records, among other sources, have all come to be taken as raw material for writing history.

Accordingly, official documents were used in this research as sources to make sense of the government machinery that operated around the literacy projects, but not as the most important evidence about the past or as representing the final word about what has happened in my country. I consulted documents that were produced during distinct political regimes, through the military dictatorship (1964-1985), and the New Republic years (1985-present). Each of these historical periods had its own possibilities and limitations. When combined these documents

form a mosaic, including both what was crucial and what was insignificant in terms of literacy.

In addition, the effort to deconstruct the official narrative involves recognising not only the conditions under which the documents were produced but also the archiving process used in Brazil. Our public files have experienced great changes in organisational policy and physical location that have led to the loss of documents. These losses were significant particularly in the field of education, where the preservation of documents suffered from mergers of departments, changes of government, and the negligence of public authorities.

Taking these considerations about official documents into account, the first step taken was to look into the proceedings of the National Congress. Figure 1 shows the search systems of the Gazettes of the Senate portal.

Figure 1: Gazettes of the Senate portal

The screenshot shows the 'Diário do Senado' portal. The browser address bar displays 'legis.senado.gov.br/diarios/Diario'. The page header includes 'Portal Publicações Diários'. A descriptive paragraph states that the Diário do Senado Federal and the Diário do Congresso Nacional are official informative organs of the Parliament, publishing session records, laws, administrative acts, and other information. Below this, there are two main sections: 'Edições' (Editions) and 'Pesquisa' (Search).

Edições

Diários anteriores a Janeiro de 1954 podem ser encontrados no [Arquivo do Senado](#).

A data da capa do Diário é a do dia seguinte à sessão.

Calendar for August 2015 (SF Agosto 2015):

D	S	T	Q	Q	S	S
						01
02	03	04	05	06	07	08
09	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Agosto 2015 OK

☐ com suplemento ☐ retificado

Pesquisa

Diário de: ☒ Senado Federal ☒ Congresso Nacional

Buscar em: ☒ Sumário ☒ Atas ☒ Composição do Senado

Data do diário: de [] até []

Para ver a relação dos Suplementos no período selecionado acima [clique aqui](#).

Com todas as palavras: []

Com a expressão: []

Com qualquer uma das palavras: []

Sem as palavras: []

Pesquisar Limpar

SAIBA MAIS

- O que é o Diário?
- Como acessar o texto integral de algum projeto ou matéria legislativa?
- Como acessar a discussão ou a votação de algum projeto ou matéria legislativa?
- Como acessar um discurso?

Source: Publications section - Gazettes of the Senate portal

Through this online portal, I was able to access and download the content of the Gazettes of the Senate and the Gazettes of the Joint Sessions between the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. However, I was not able to research the Gazettes of Chamber of Deputies, as those documents were not yet available for online consultation in this portal or in the Chamber of Deputies portal. During the period under consideration (1971-1989), my search indicated the existence of 354 quotations about literacy in the Gazettes of the Senate and 136 passages in the Gazettes of the Joint Sessions.

Figure 2: Speech given by Senator João Calmon in the ordinary session of 20-05-1971, the transcription of which was reviewed by the speaker prior to publication

REPÚBLICA FEDERATIVA DO BRASIL
DIÁRIO DO CONGRESSO NACIONAL
Seção II
ANO XXVI - N.º 27
QUINTA-FEIRA, 27 DE MAIO DE 1971
BRASÍLIA - DF

SENADO FEDERAL

ATA DA 41.ª SESSÃO
EM 26 DE MAIO DE 1971
1.ª Sessão Legislativa Ordinária
da 1.ª Legislatura

PRESIDÊNCIA DOS SRS. PETERBONTO
PONTES E CARLOS LINDENBERG

As 14 horas e 30 minutos, situam-se
presentes os Srs. Senadores:

Adalberto Silva — Gervásio Mesquita — José Lindoso — José Bressane —
Cassiano Pinheiro — Renato Franco —
Alexandre Costa — José Barreto —
Ferreira Castello-Branco — Pôrto da
Pereira — Helder de Azevedo — Wal-
mar Azevedo — Wilson Gonçalves —
Dante Filho — José Faria —
Ruy Carneiro — Wilson Gonçalves —
Luis Cavalcanti — Leônidas Baptista —
Antônio Fernandes — Ray Santos
Carlos Lindenberg — Ruy Carneiro —
José Calmon — Paulo Tasso —
Benjamin Pinheiro — Dárcio Zúñiga —
Nelson Cavalcanti — Gustavo Capa-
ra — Orlando Sampaio — Pôrto da
Costa — Salomão Dória — Ray
Braga — Daniel Krüger — Guido
Mendonça.

O SR. PRESIDENTE (Pôrto da
Costa) — A lista de presença está a
complementar de 25 Srs. Senadores.
Há número registado, declaram-se
aberto a Sessão. Há expediente sobre a mesa,
que está sob o Sr. 1.º-Secretário.

É lido e aprovado
EXPEDIENTE
MENSAGEM DO PRESIDENTE
DA REPÚBLICA

De agradecimento de homenagem
referente a senado de nome indi-
cado para cargo cujo provimento
depende de projeto apresentado ao
Senado Federal:

— N.º 184/71 (S.º 184/71), na ofi-
cial, de 20 de maio, referen-
te a senado de nome indicado
para cargo cujo provimento
depende de projeto apresentado ao
Senado Federal, apresentado com
a de Beneditino (para ao Go-
verno da Comunidade do Aca-
re);

De agradecimento de homenagem de sa-
lvação de nome Legislativo:

— N.º 184/71 (S.º 184/71), na ofi-
cial, de 20 de maio, referen-
te ao Decreto Legislativo n.º 31,
de 1971, que aprova o texto do
Decreto n.º 1.188, de 19-6-71;

— N.º 184/71 (S.º 184/71), na ofi-
cial, de 20 de maio, referen-
te ao Decreto Legislativo n.º 32,
de 1971, que aprova o texto do
Decreto n.º 1.189, de 19-6-71;

— N.º 184/71 (S.º 184/71), na ofi-
cial, de 20 de maio, referen-
te ao Decreto Legislativo n.º 33,
de 1971, que aprova o texto do
Decreto n.º 1.190, de 19-6-71;

de 1971, que aprova o texto do
Decreto n.º 1.181, de 19-6-71;

Requerida a aprovação do projeto de
lei mencionado:

— N.º 184/71 (S.º 184/71), na ofi-
cial, de 20 de maio, referen-
te ao Projeto de Lei Complementar
n.º 1, de 1971 (CEN), que indi-
ca o Projeto de Assembleia ao
Tribunal do Brasil, e da ordem
prevista (projeto que se
transforma na Lei Complementar
n.º 1, de 20 de maio de 1971).

PARECERES
N.º 41, DE 1971
DA COMISSÃO DIRETORA
Sobre o Requerimento n.º 41, de
1971.

Relator: Sr. Cláudio Nogueira

A Comissão apresenta o Parecer so-
bre o Requerimento n.º 41, de 1971,
de autoria do Senador João Calmon,
adotando a transcrição, nos Anais
do Senado, do discurso proferido pelo
Ministro do Tribunal do Brasil, na
ocasião da manifestação que lhe
foi tribuída no Congresso, a 18 de
maio de 1971. — Pôrto da Costa,
Presidente — Cláudio Nogueira, Relator
— Carlos Lindenberg — Ray Braga —
Guido Mendonça — Dante Filho.

**DISCURSO PRONUNCIADO PELO SR. SE-
NADOR JOÃO CALMON NA SESSÃO
ORDINÁRIA DO DIA 20-5-1971 QUE,
ENTREGUE À REVISÃO DO ORADOR,
SERIA PUBLICADO POSTERIORMENTE.**

**O SR. JOÃO CALMON (Lê o se-
guinte discurso.) — Sr. Presidente,
Srs. Senadores, desejei que o meu pri-
meiro pronunciamento no Senado
marcasse uma data e um aconteci-
mento que têm, para mim, significa-
ção especial.**

Source: DSF, 27/05/1971, pp. 1515-1536

Sometimes, one session presented several speeches and comments about literacy, while in others I would only find a small statement. It is also important to

note that not all the quotations are actually about literacy itself; sometimes the senators were only using literacy to justify an argument about something else. These pronouncements, reports, and bills provided data in relation to the sometimes long and complex gestation of laws and resolutions. The Gazettes also revealed some of the political manoeuvrings and the disputes between the government party and the opposition. These legislative sources, nevertheless, are connected with the political and personal interests of senators and deputies, and as a result they represent only a privileged section of society.

Secondly, I consulted the online library of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics to examine the Statistical Yearbooks of Brazil for the years 1971 to 1989. The yearbooks, which provide statistical data related to public expenditures, education, and literacy, allowed me to identify the amount of public money invested, the number of students enrolled, and literacy rates, among other key information. Accessing such documents also enabled me to make useful comparisons, as, for example, between the total revenue of the federal government and the percentage of government expenditure accounted for by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Taken together, these statistics constitute important aspects of my research. However, dealing with quantitative data requires the utmost caution so as not to reduce people's complex and vibrant lives to numbers.

Finally, I examined federal legislation and governmental documents about elementary education and literacy, which are available at the online portals of the Brazilian Republican Presidency, the Brazilian Senate, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, the Brazilian Ministry of Education, the JusBrasil, and the Public Domain. Table 1 shows in detail the documents that were consulted:

Table 1. Consulted Brazilian federal legislation and governmental documents (1971-1989)

Legislation	Archive
Law no. 5,692/1971. Sets the Directives and Bases for Elementary and Secondary Education and gives other provision.	Brazilian Chamber of Deputies Online Portal
Resolution no. 08/1971. Sets the common core curricula for Elementary and Secondary Education, defining goals and range.	JusBrasil Online Portal
MOBRAL (1973). Basic Document. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Mobral.	Public Domain Portal
MOBRAL (1975). Spell Mobral and Read Brasil. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Mobral.	Public Domain Portal
Ministry of Education and Culture (1980). The school of 1 ^o Degree and the curriculum. 2nd ed.	Public Domain Portal
Ministry of Education and Culture (1980). The school of 1 ^o Degree and the curriculum: special training. 2nd ed.	Public Domain Portal
Proposal no. 295/1985. Education for all. The proposal for Basic Education.	Brazilian Senate Online Portal

Source: Brazilian Republican Presidency Online Portal, Brazilian Chamber of Deputies Online Portal, Brazilian Chamber of Deputies Online Portal, Brazilian Ministry of Education Online Portal, JusBrasil Online Portal, and Public Domain Portal

These sources were analysed to understand the official government perspective on education and the curriculum framework. In particular, I extracted from them the principles for literacy learning and elementary education adopted by the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is important to note, however, that there is a significant gap between the official discourse and schools practices that are reformulated daily. Mutch (2009, pp. 2-3) points out the “nuances” that curriculum can take when discussed at different levels, for example, at “aspirational,” “official,” and “enacted” contexts. Additionally, the official documents also present a false image of consensus. The publication of a law or curriculum document usually overshadows the conflicts involved whenever a particular matter has been

discussed.

2.5 Newspapers and magazines as research sources

Nowadays the use of journalistic sources such as newspapers, magazines, almanacs, and periodic flyers for historical research purposes is becoming increasingly common. This phenomenon was sharpened especially by the publication of the book *Constructing the Past*, edited by Nora and Le Goff (1985), which addressed new problems, approaches, and objects of contemporary history. For Luca (2008) though, there are two main types of historical research involving the press at present. The first is related to the “history of the press,” where the printed material is the central focus of investigation. The second is connected with “history through the press,” where the print material is taken as one piece to be consulted among others to answer an enquiry (Luca, 2008).

In both cases, history of the press and history through the press, researchers should perceive the press not only as a vehicle of communication but also as an agent with a broader social function (Luca, 2008). For this purpose some aspects linked with publication such as the editorial bias, the interests of the publishing group, and the motivations of writers and editors must be taken into account. In addition information about the size of print runs, the target audience and the degree of diffusion of the publication among the reading public helps to place the newspaper or magazine in context. Forms of funding and profit, such as creating a news stand network and selling advertising space, also need to be considered (Luca, 2008).

Another significant factor, highlighted by Chartier (1997) with respect to working with written texts in general (but valid for working specifically with the

press), is that the meaning of a text depends not only on the language used but also on its physical format and layout. This argument is significant particularly in the analysis of the press where format and layout are managed carefully to focus readers' attention, thereby influencing judgements about the relative importance of articles. In this way the location of an article within the publication, the organisation of columns, the presence of illustrations and photographs, the size of fonts and eye-catching headlines, among other factors, direct attention and build meaning.

Finally, to use newspaper and magazines properly as sources for writing "history *through* the press," it is necessary to understand the "history *of* the press." The production of print products developed relatively late in Brazil. The Portuguese crown prohibited the manufacture of industrial goods during the colonial period (1500-1815) as a means of forcing the purchase of these products from the mother country. Only after 1808, with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in Brazil due to the Napoleonic Wars, was the printing of newspapers and books legalised inside the country. During the same year, the Royal Press was created and the first Brazilian newspaper to be printed in Brazil was published.

In subsequent years a large number of newspapers, magazines, and almanacs were established in Brazil. In the beginning, the majority of newspapers acted as the organs of political factions and, from time to time, animosities intensified, leading to outright attacks on the machinery of rival companies. Later, in the twentieth century, the persecution of journalists and censorship of content by the state came to be more troublesome for the press. The two dictatorial periods, the New State (1937 - 1945) and the military dictatorship (1964 - 1985), affected the press profoundly, with the implementation of state strategies deliberately intended

to monitor and to control the flow of information.

Throughout the New State dictatorship, censorship was linked to advertising techniques, where dissenting voices were silenced and the achievements of the Government were amplified (Capelato, 1999). The Department of Press and Advertisement (DIP) stifled criticism of the Government through threats to close companies and cut the supply of paper, while using its authority to promote nationalist feelings and foster a cult around the image of the dictator, Getúlio Vargas, so that he was portrayed as the father of the poor.

In 1964, most newspapers and magazines had supported the coup against Goulart. However, when the military applied stronger measures against political freedom and freedom of speech, some began to criticise the government. In response, the government enforced pre-publication censorship. The relations between the state and the press were complex, and the line separating those media outlets that resisted the military regime and those that supported it was blurred (Castilho, 2010). Some acted in a systematic way to expose the censorship, as when *O Estado de São Paulo* continuously printed the love poetry of Luís de Camões in place of repressed material to create a strange juxtaposition of content and call its readers' attention to the censorship. Other like-minded papers and magazines employed a similar strategy, replacing censored content with, for example, cooking recipes and images of little demons. The censorship was not selective, however, for even conservative newspapers that did not actively oppose the government had articles quietly censored (Castilho, 2010).

To better understand the broader discussions about literacy in contemporary Brazilian society, I consulted the digital archives of one newspaper and one

magazine with nationwide circulation in Brazil, *Folha de São Paulo* and *Veja*, respectively, which were printed continuously throughout the 1970s and 1980s. I accessed interviews, photographs, advertisements, and even accounts of scandals, all of which helped me to follow a wide range of debates about literacy. It is worth noting, however, the limitation of these documents in relation to their nature as commercial mass-print media. Being produced for profit, they need to follow the needs of the market. Additionally, newspapers and magazines are subjected to the will and editorial line of their owners. Their reports, therefore, cannot be perceived as objective representations of reality. Finally, both *Folha de São Paulo* and *Veja* present views of the country from the urban, industrial and wealthy Southeast, which do not necessarily address the concerns of those from the rural North and Northeast.

Figure 3 - Collection of the Folha Group

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL `acervo.folha.com.br/busca_detalhada/`. The page features the **acervoFOLHA** logo and a search bar with the text "busca Digite aqui". Below the search bar, there are dropdown menus for "Jornais" (set to "FOLHA DE S. PAULO") and "Desde 1921". A yellow starburst icon indicates "Acesso gratuito no período de degustação".

The main search area is titled **Busca detalhada** and includes several options and input fields:

- Radio buttons for ☒ **Folha de S. Paulo**, ☐ **Folha da Manhã**, and ☐ **Folha da Noite**.
- Search criteria: **com todas as palavras**, **com a frase exata**, **com pelo menos uma das palavras**, and **sem as palavras**.
- Period selection: **Escolha o período** with "De" and "Até" date pickers, and **Escolha a data exata** with "Dia", "Mês", and "Ano" dropdowns.
- Filters: **Caderno** (set to "Todos") and **Tema** (set to "Todos").
- A blue **BUSCAR** button at the bottom.

Source: Folha Group Collection website

The Collection of the Folha Group provides digital access to the *Folha de São Paulo*, the *Folha da Manhã*, and the *Folha da Noite* newspapers from 1921 to 2014. Searches in this portal can be made by word, phrase, or time period either in a particular section (sports, everyday news, tourism, etc.), a specific newspaper, or in the whole portal. For the period 1971 to 1989, a search in the portal had 1,807 results with the term *literacy*.

Figure 4 - Folha de São Paulo newspaper

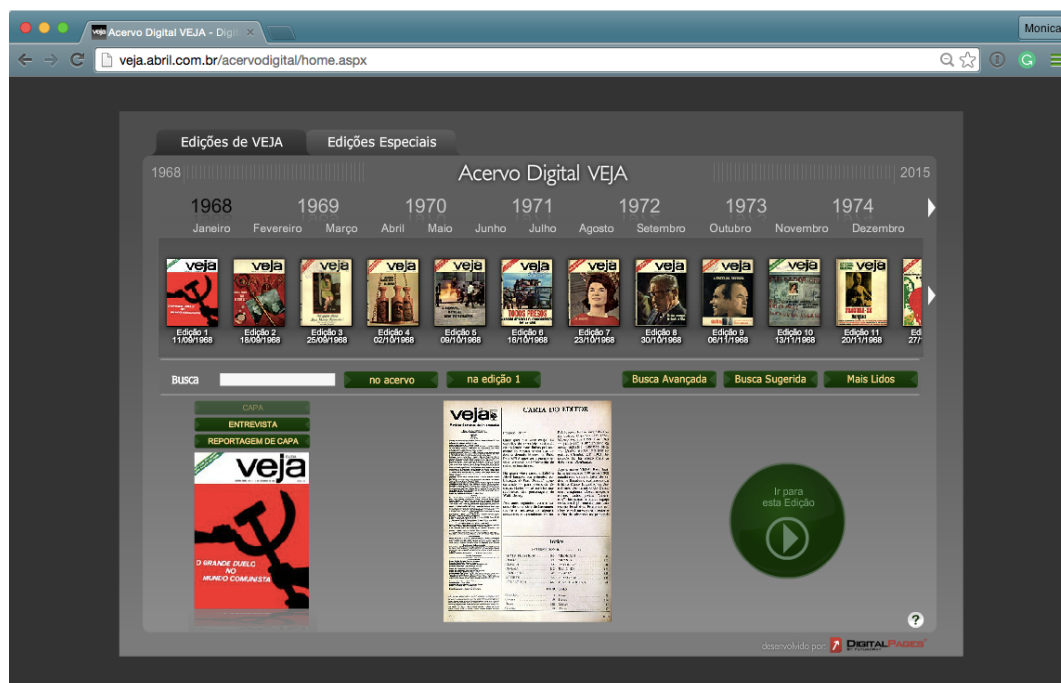


Source: MOBRAL: novas frentes no Interior (1971, cover); MOBRAL: em 1980, analfabetismo cai para 10 por cento (1971, p. 10)

The *Folha de São Paulo* was established in 1961, when the *Folha da Manhã*, the *Folha da Tarde*, and the *Folha da Noite* newspapers were combined into a single edition. In 1964 the newspaper stood openly for the military coup against João Goulart, maintaining a position of indirect support until the end of the regime.

Since the 1980s the *Folha de São Paulo* has maintained one of the highest circulations of any newspaper in Brazil.

Figure 5 - Collection of the Digital Veja



Source: Digital Veja Collection website

The Collection of the Digital Veja provides digital access to *Veja* magazine between the years 1968 and 2009. This portal can be searched by word, phrase, or by time period. A search with the term *literacy* shows 220 results from 1971 to 1989.

Figure 6 - Veja magazine



Source: MOBRAL: os primeiros dois milhões (1971, cover); As primeiras luzes. Um ano de Mobral contra a escuridão do analfabetismo (1971, p. 38)

Veja magazine has been published weekly since 1968, and it currently holds the majority of private subscribers in Brazil. In the first years the magazine had a centre-left editorial line which, after the 1980s, moved gradually closer to a neoliberal view. It is important to add that the same publishing house that produces this magazine, Abril Group, is responsible for having edited the textbooks of the *Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização* - MOBRAL (Brazilian Literacy Movement), which was instituted in place of Paulo Freire's National Literacy Programme as the military dictatorship's option for teaching adults how to read and write.

Of all the documents consulted in this research, the newspapers and the magazines present the most captivating content in terms of the politics of literacy in Brazil. They do not, however, provide a clear mirror into the past. On the contrary,

they present a distorted and filtered version of what happened or what might have happened. The content of the publications analysed, *Folha de São Paulo* and *Veja*, for example, passed through many filters in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to those always present in the press, like the view of journalists, the perspective of editors, the limitations of the company budget, and the interests of the publishing group, there was also the severe censorship imposed by the Brazilian state as well as the self-censorship practices sustained by fear of government persecution.

2.6 Conclusion

My methodological strategy was one of cross-referencing documents of different types and origin, such as the legislative procedures, the censuses, the governmental documents and the press articles, as a means to develop a more comprehensive interpretation of the politics of literacy in Brazil between 1971 and 1989. The narrative I produce from these sources, however, is not neutral but connected to Freire and Macedo's perspective in which "literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 141). Literacy learning and literacy analysis, therefore, closely relate to the endeavour to perceive one's historical existence and to the struggle of becoming more fully human. In this way, literacy becomes an important part of the broader process of denouncing social injustices and working towards a fairer society for all.

Chapter 3

The history of Brazil from the First Republic to the Military Dictatorship

This chapter presents an overview of the history of Brazil as a republic until the first years of the military government, and some of the early attempts to expand access to literacy learning and elementary education. It also shows how authoritarian and anti-democratic practices are deeply rooted in the country's history. Brazil's experience as a republic can be organised into five periods: the First Republic (1889-1930), the Vargas Years (1930-1945), the National-development Years (1945-1964), the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985), and the New Republic (1985-present). While acknowledging the problems related to a political periodisation of the past and the difficulty in establishing the specific time when a period begins or ends, I adopted this method of organisation to aid those readers who may be unfamiliar with the subject. This decision does not imply, however, that I consider a political view of history to be any more important than an economic, social or cultural one.

3.1 First Republic

In the late nineteenth century, the Brazilian imperial political organisation was weakened. A prolonged crisis in the coffee-producing sector, conflicts between the State and the Church, and discontent in the army intensified the push for a Republican form of government. There were also suspicions about the health of

Emperor Dom Pedro II and concerns about an uncertain succession to the throne (Priore, 2003). The Republican movement was backed predominantly by wealthy landlords, self-employed professionals and by army officers. In 1889, without violence or resistance, the military proclaimed Brazil a republic (J. M. Carvalho, 2003).

For almost forty years thereafter the centre of power would alternate between the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. The domination of these two states had economic and demographic origins (J. M. Carvalho, 2003). The number of inhabitants of a state in Brazil determined the proportional representation in the Chamber of Deputies, and the five most populous states in Brazil – Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Bahia, Rio Grande do Sul, and Pernambuco – accounted for more than half of the total population in 1920. Nonetheless, in the same year, only Minas Gerais and São Paulo together represented 34 percent of the Brazilian population (J. M. Carvalho, 2003).

In addition to this unequal balance of forces between the states, the Republican Constitution denied the right of suffrage to women, foreigners, minors (less than twenty-one years old), and to those who could not read or write, thus reducing the size of the voting public to approximately 10 percent of the total population. Even then, the majority of those persons eligible to vote chose not to do so (J. M. Carvalho, 2003). Individuals hired by entrenched politicians or their affiliates physically controlled the voting places, coercing any suspected opposition supporters into voting for their strong-man bosses, and reports of violence were common. In addition, as J. M. Carvalho (2003, p. 105) has pointed out, “there was fraud in the enlistment of voters, fraud in the vote, fraud in the counting of votes,

fraud in recognition of the elected.”

At the same time, and in a contradictory way, there was considerable ideological fervour around the idea that democracy and education would redeem the country (Nagle, 1977). The Republican Constitution called for free access to elementary education for all citizens but did not provide the fiscal or material basis for this to become a reality. Nevertheless, the Government did enact the first Republican educational regulation (1890-1891), also known as the Benjamin Constant Reform, which presented the general principles for instruction to be followed in schools nationwide such as curricular norms, teaching staff guidelines, and sources of school funding.

The model adopted for elementary education was the *Grupos Escolares* (School Groups), which proposed serial (1st year, 2nd year, etc.) as well as graduated teaching (where the lessons became more complex as students progressed). Large, well-appointed schools were built, in part to cast a negative light on the educational legacy of the imperial past which the Republicans perceived as having been characterised by ideological and infrastructural deficiencies (Schueler & Magaldi, 2009). The new schools were intended to instil into the students an appreciation for the cultural, ideological and aesthetic symbolism of the nascent republic. Furthermore new time and class schedules were developed, marked now by clocks, bells, and chimes to replace the haphazard system of the past (Faria Filho & Vidal, 2000).

In the early twentieth century, another enthusiastic movement for education started with the Olavo Bilac conferences in 1915 and the formation of the National Defence League in 1916 (Nagle, 1977). Of a nationalist character, this movement

promoted the learning of Brazilian history and geography, and of Portuguese as the national language. The fight against illiteracy and the need to integrate all citizens into a cohesive national identity was also addressed. There was a romantic perception that considered the diffusion of primary education as the key to solving all problems. The major consequences of the movement were the implementation of the Education National Conferences, the publication of a greater number of educational journals and the creation of the Universities of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais (Nagle, 1977).

The public elementary education system, however, remained incapable of adequately serving the entire population. The construction of a small number of expensive public schools following the model of the Schools Groups was criticised by those persons who desired a more democratic access to education (Faria Filho & Vidal, 2000). They proposed instead a different architecture for school buildings, with a functional approach valuing the climate and the customs of each region replacing the standardized constructions in use across the country. There was also an associated movement to revitalise libraries and school museums and to establish school laboratories and medical offices (Faria Filho & Vidal, 2000).

In 1929, campaigning began for the 1930 presidential elections. Washington Luís, Brazil's president at the time, was from the *Partido Republicano Paulista* (Paulista Republican Party) of São Paulo. He was expected to follow the informal agreement between his own party and the *Partido Republicano Mineiro* (Mineiro Republican Party) of Minas Gerais, the other dominant party in the country, according to which the presidency would alternate between them. However, Luís decided to break this tradition and support Júlio Prestes, another candidate from

São Paulo. This defection boosted the prospects of Getúlio Vargas, a third-party candidate from Rio Grande do Sul, with João Pessoa from Paraíba as vice-president. Vargas formed the Liberal Alliance and ended up being embraced by the Mineiro Republican Party, which had opted for not putting its own candidate forward. The race for the presidency was further complicated by the stock market crash in New York, which had a ripple effect in Brazil that shut down factories and raised unemployment rates.

The elections were held in March 1930, and Júlio Prestes, the São Paulo candidate, won. Júlio Prestes received around a million votes, against 737,000 votes for Getúlio Vargas (Ferreira & Pinto, 2006, p. 16). The Liberal Alliance supporters did not accept the defeat, and the murder of João Pessoa in July 1930 triggered demonstrations against the Government. The reasons for this crime were related to personal disputes between João Pessoa and the murderer. Despite that fact, João Pessoa was turned into a martyr by the members of the Liberal Alliance. The insurgency began in October 1930 in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais. Pressure from the forces coming from the South and popular demonstrations in favour of the Liberal Alliance forced Júlio Prestes to resign even before his inauguration. As a result Getúlio Vargas was invested as President in November 1930, a move that represented a substantial shift in Brazil's political scenario (Ferreira & Pinto, 2006).

3.2 Vargas Years

Over the next four years, Vargas ruled provisionally until a new constitution was proclaimed. This period was marked by a strong military presence, with officers occupying key positions in the Government. After confrontations with politicians

from the opposition, especially from São Paulo, the constitution was enacted in 1934. This constitution was controversial because it amplified the executive power. Nevertheless, some social advances were introduced such as the secret ballot, women's suffrage, fair labour practices for urban workers and the principle of free compulsory elementary education for boys and girls. The constituents also agreed that the next president would be elected indirectly by members of the Constituent Assembly, a move which ensured that Vargas would have four more years in office.

The 1930s were notable for transformations in the educational field. In 1930, for example, the Ministry of Education and Public Health was created. This was the first governmental body to focus specifically on educational issues at the federal level. In 1931, the National Board of Education was organised, and the laws governing secondary and tertiary education were reformulated to provide further regulation of the national curriculum to be followed. In 1932, the *Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova* (Manifesto of the Pioneers for the New Education) was published. The *Manifesto*, prepared by Fernando Azevedo and signed by 26 Brazilian educators, reasserted the urgent need for free compulsory elementary education for both genders as well as the need for a strong public education system with a secular curriculum. In this way, the manifesto offered a counterpoint to the Catholic and conservative sectors that favoured an educational system based on private institutions, many of them with a religious orientation.

The *Manifesto* was influenced by progressive theories of education that had been developed internationally, especially by Adolphe Ferrière and John Dewey, and subsequently in Brazil by Fernando de Azevedo and Manuel Bergström Lourenço Filho. Retrospective analyses of Azevedo's writings tend to focus on his

calls for the need to democratise education and reform the school system while de-emphasizing the conservative dimension in his work as a “well-intentioned mistake” (M. M. Carvalho, 1998, p. 5). Azevedo’s progressive arguments for freedom in learning, for example, were connected to more questionable views that saw institutional efficiency and social discipline as equal. Some of his goals for education were also problematically in line with those of many doctors, hygienists and engineers at that time, who advocated regulating people’s everyday lives in an attempt to shape them to their own ideals (M. M. Carvalho, 1998).

In 1937, on the eve of a new presidential election, the National Congress declared a national emergency on the grounds, later proved baseless, that communists were plotting to seize power in the country. Getúlio Vargas, inspired to some extent by anti-liberal and anti-democratic ideologies in Europe after the First World War, staged a successful coup with the support of the military and established what would become known later as the *Estado Novo* (New State). Vargas’s dictatorial regime dismissed the National Congress, approved a new Constitution with a fascist inspiration, censored the mass media, declared communists to be public enemies, and arrested political opponents.

The formulation of educational guidelines in the New State had direct military involvement (Bomeny, 1999). The armed forces were closely involved in shaping the minds of the young and in constructing a civil identity through an overt policy of ‘Brazilianisation’. One action that had a considerable impact in this regard was the nationalisation of education. Two measures were taken: i) the adoption of a national school curriculum to overcome regional idiosyncrasies; and ii) the forceful integration of foreign immigrant communities. These measures were intended to

force a Brazilian national identity on immigrant groups. The result was not only that German, Italian, Japanese, Polish, and Russian communities were forced to abandon the use of their first language, but also that their private schools were closed and their familiar cultural activities suppressed (Bomeny, 1999).

This, however, marked the height of Vargas's power. During the next half decade his administration declined quickly. In 1942, under popular pressure following the sinking of Brazilian ships by German submarines, the army joined the Allied forces in the Second World War. Brazil's entry into the fight against the totalitarian regimes in Europe helped to bring to light more clearly the inconsistencies of the Vargas government, which was itself an undemocratic regime. In 1945, improvements in the global economy with greater prosperity, post-war optimism, and the return of soldiers led to the liberalisation of political parties, the announcing of new presidential elections, and the approval of an amnesty for those persons convicted of political crimes. A portion of the military, afraid of a new coup, deposed Vargas. José Linhares, President of the Supreme Court, replaced him provisionally until new elections could be held.

3.3 National-Development Years

The new elections were held in December 1945, with Eduardo Gomes running against Eurico Gaspar Dutra, both of whom were high-ranking military officers. Dutra, who received the explicit support of Vargas, won the elections and was sworn in as President in January 1946. His government shifted over the course of its five years in power from adopting a more liberal model of open trade designed to control inflation to one of state intervention deliberately to restrict imports and to protect the internal market (Bastos, 2004).

This tendency towards state intervention would continued through the 1950s, a decade that was characterised by the introduction of national policies that prioritised economic development. First, with the new constitutional mandate of President Vargas, who came back into power in 1951, an initiative was taken to promote industry in Brazil by tapping domestic, rather than foreign, sources of capital. This was achieved mainly by making public revenue available for the creation of state-owned companies, such as *Vale do Rio Doce* in mining and Petrobras in oil exploration. Vargas believed that by stimulating industrialisation he could better mediate conflicts between social classes⁴.

Second, during the term of President Jucelino Kubitschek (1956 to 1961), durable goods production on a large scale was facilitated by the tripartite socio-political structure comprising the State, Brazilian business people and foreign capital (E. R. Souza, 2010). Jucelino Kubitschek's political slogan was 'fifty years in five,' which reflected his ambition of accelerating economic development to the point that fifty years of progress would be achieved in only five. His main project was relocating the capital from Rio de Janeiro to the purpose-built city of Brasília in the Midwest, a region that up to that point had been almost uninhabited.

In 1959 the *Manifesto dos Educadores* (Educators' Manifesto) was published. The document was prepared once again by Fernando Azevedo and signed by 189 Brazilian educators. A dispute between the proponents of public schools and those of private schools arose during the discussions over a series of curricular guidelines

⁴ Vargas's attempt to mediate the conflicting forces was unsuccessful. In 1954 the opposition, high-ranked military personnel and part of the press media sought the resignation of the President, who decided to take his own life. Vargas supposedly left a suicide letter blaming international and national economic groups for the crisis and stating that he had given his life and his death to the people. The suicide and the letter caused a large popular commotion and a momentary loss in the influence of the opposition (Skidmore, 1967/2010).

called *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (Law of Directives and Bases of National Education) (Sanfelice, 2007). The law, representing a compromise between the contending groups, was approved in 1961. It confirmed the right to access education for all but it also allocated public funds to private institutions. Elementary education was organised into three levels: elementary (with four years), complementary (with one year), and supplementary (with two years) (Veiga, 2007). Despite the changes, the number of positions in schools continued to be far short of what was necessary to reach universal attendance.

In what would become a tortuous presidency, Jânio Quadros took over the office from January to August in 1961. Quadros and the National Congress fell out even before his inauguration (Loureiro, 2009). He neglected alliances and made an aggressive speech against his predecessor, Kubitschek. Quadros discredited the legislature, believing that the public would support him. The Congress reacted by establishing a Parliamentary Policy Committee, which made it more difficult for the president to pass new initiatives into law. The relationship between the Executive and the Congress continued to deteriorate until, finally, the President resigned. Quadros expected a popular clamour for his return, but that did not happen. In the absence of Vice-President João Goulart, who was on a diplomatic mission in China, Ranieri Mazzilli, President of the Chamber of Deputies, was invested temporarily in his place (Loureiro, 2009).

A portion of the military, operating under the influence of the United States, rejected Goulart as President, having declared that his leftist tendencies could cause the country to drift towards communism (I. A. Silva, 2012). This group actively supported a call for new elections. In response a resistance campaign, labelled as

the *Campanha da Legalidade* (Legality Campaign), was organised. This campaign's supporters sought the safe return of Goulart and his subsequent inauguration as President. The governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Leonel Brizola, with the help of the governor of Goiás, Mauro Borges Teixeira, provided regular radio updates on the tense situation. They also received support from the III Army Division located in Rio Grande do Sul. Nine days after Quadros's resignation a constitutional amendment was approved that changed the government to a parliamentary structure and limited the powers the President. This move made Goulart less of a threat in the military's eyes, and he was allowed to return to Brazil and to take office (I. A. Silva, 2012).

In the more radical atmosphere of the 1960s, land reform discussions gained political traction in Brazil. Large landholdings dominated medium and small properties with the result that in many cases large areas were kept empty and without any production. In order to change this situation, the first *Ligas Camponesas* (Rural Leagues) were established in the Northeast. However, the movement spread quickly to the rest of the country. The peasants sought better work conditions and the appropriation of uncultivated land, while the large landowners desired to maintain their vast holdings. The communist revolutions in Cuba and China inspired some Rural Leagues members, like Francisco Julião, to seek a similar path. The Leagues' activities were reported on national and international newspapers, frightening conservative politicians in Brazil as well as their counterparts in the United States.

A latent social problem was the persistent high level of illiteracy. There were several attempts to confront this pressing issue, one which took the form of the

Movimento de Cultura Popular – MCP (Popular Culture Movement) organised by Miguel Arraes, initially the Mayor of Recife from 1960 to 1962 and later Governor of Pernambuco from 1962 to 1964 (Coelho, 2002). The movement operated on various fronts in primary schools, vocational schools, “culture circles”, craft and fine arts centres, libraries, cinemas, and theatres. It also sponsored education through radio, and medical care for children and adults, among other programmes. There was an effort to embrace practices that fell outside the accepted sense of culture and popular culture (Gonçalves, 2012). All counsellors worked as volunteers, including well-known educators like Abelardo da Hora, Reinaldo Pessoa, Aluizio Falcão, Anita Paes Barreto, Arnaldo Marques, Geraldo Vieira, Germano Coelho, Norma Porto Carreiro Coelho and Paulo Freire. There was a strong held belief in the notion of human potential, and more than 20,000 students participated in the movement over just two years (Coelho, 2002).

Another similar programme known as the *Campanha de Pé no Chão também se aprende a Ler* (Barefoot Also Learn to Read Campaign), was headed by Djalma Maranhão, Mayor of Natal, the capital of Rio Grande do Norte (Cavalvanti, 2012). In 1961, Moacyr Góes, the local Secretary of Education, acted on a suggestion from a local resident that if there was no money available to construct schools of masonry then they should be made of straw. In the following weeks warehouses covered with straw were built to house classrooms, lunchrooms, and libraries. The staff in these contributed to the educational and cultural development of not only children but also adults. The Campaign received support from several influential patrons such as João Goulart, Luís da Câmara Cascudo, Paulo Freire, and Cardinal Dom Eugênio Sales (Cavalvanti, 2012).

A third effort was the *Movimento de Educação de Base* – MEB (Base Education Movement), a national radio-based literacy programme coordinated by the Catholic Church, mainly for the rural areas (Borges, 2012). This movement was funded federally and can be regarded as a type of popular education which approximated formal education in state schools in the areas of literacy and of moral and civic education, but with an added focus on practical subjects such as health education, professional training, and social promotion. From 1962 the movement assumed a more radical political tendency in that it began to address the development of people's critical awareness (Borges, 2012).

Still another initiative was the introduction of *Centros Populares de Cultura* – CPCs (Popular Culture Centres), created in 1961 to disseminate popular revolutionary art (Misoczky, 2012). Related to the *União Nacional de Estudantes* – UNE (National Student Union), the Centres spread over thirty cities, proclaiming the collective nature of art and defending the right of artists to take political stands. The centres were involved in activities that embraced theatre, music, film, architecture, literature, fine arts, adult literacy, medical care, and legal services. Theatre productions were staged in factories, trade unions, and in student unions; movies and songs were released; and low-price book fairs were held (Misoczky, 2012). According to Garcia (2004, p. 150), popular culture was “understood as one of the possibilities of transformation of the Brazilian reality,” in the sense that working *with* rather than *for* the underprivileged was seen as being a better means of creating positive social change.

Significant, also, were the efforts of Paulo Freire in Angicos in 1962-63 (Misoczky, 2012). Freire had been developing a theoretical basis for literacy

programmes since the late 1950s. His reflections were deepened through participation in the Popular Culture Movement, the Paraíba Popular Education Campaign, and in the Barefoot Also Learn to Read Campaign. Aluizio Alves, Governor of Rio Grande do Norte, invited Paulo Freire to coordinate a project in the backcountry, funded by the *Superintendência de Desenvolvimento do Nordeste* – SUDENE (Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast) in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Despite his discomfort with receiving American funding, Freire accepted the invitation (Góes, 2002).

Freire believe that education should be utilised as a means of understanding the world and of achieving full rights of citizenship. He conducted a survey initially of the everyday lexicon of the residents of Angicos to identify the words and themes to focus on in the on-going programme. After that, twenty-one coordinators of Culture Circles were selected. Then, forty hours of classes in the Culture Circles started. In only forty-five days three hundred workers — among whom were farmers, masons, cleaners, housewives and even prisoners — became critically literate, demonstrating the feasibility and efficiency of his proposal. Various authorities together with João Goulart attended the last lecture hour, including General Castelo Branco who was seriously concerned that Freire was in effect turning the people into “rattlesnakes” which would disrupt the existing social order (M. E. Carvalho & Barbosa, 2011; Góes, 2002).

After only two years of parliamentary government, the Brazilian political system became presidential once again in 1963. This happened through a public consultation referendum that revoked the constitutional amendment conceived by

the military to limit the powers of the Executive. Nevertheless, the President faced a series of dilemmas. Goulart was trapped between keeping the conservative opposition under control while at the same time achieving the agricultural, educational, and financial reforms expected by his popular and union bases of support. Ultimately the President, unable to manage a successful consensus between the conflicting forces, was deposed by a coup on 1 April 1964 and sought exile in Uruguay.

The historiography about the 1964 coup tends to deal with memory “battles” about what happened and the meaning of those events (Reis Filho, 2004, p. 30). Some authors have focused on the actions of business owners and the influence of multinational capital in the media smear campaign against the President (Dreifuss, 1981). Others have analysed the Left’s misguided perception, after Goulart became president in 1961, that there was broad support for social change and that the Right would accept defeat passively, when in fact Goulart gained office only with help from the army, and the Right quickly undertook a steady campaign to regain power (Reis Filho, 2004). There are also those who have emphasised the reasons the military gave for becoming involved in the coup, such as that of rescuing the country from the chaos of Goulart’s government, of protecting the people from the communist threat, and of avoiding the interference of the President in issues of military hierarchy and discipline (G. A. Soares, 1994). I agree with the view of Carlos Fico that various factors contributed to the overthrow of Goulart and that although both civil and military forces contributed to the unrest, the coup itself was carried out predominantly by the military (Fico, 2012).

3.4 Military Dictatorship

The coup was widely portrayed as a revolution to prevent the expansion of communist tendencies in Brazil, which were supposed to have already infiltrated into the public administration and to be working towards the dissolution of Christian values (L. F. Silva, 2014). In the beginning, most of the large Brazilian newspapers, such as *Jornal do Brasil*, *O Globo*, *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo*, supported the military intervention, demonstrating that they feared a possible radical leftist turn in the Presidency of João Goulart more than an authoritarian intervention in the political scene (Motta, 2013). As a consequence, a “dictatorship under military hegemony” was born in April 1964 (Goulart, 2014, p. 28).

The theoretical basis of the dictatorship can be found in the Doctrine of National Security and Development, which reflected the Cold War dichotomisation of the world between the Soviet bloc countries and those aligned with the United States of America (Giannasi, 2011). The Doctrine, initially developed by General Golbery do Couto e Silva during his time at the Brazilian Department of War Studies in 1952, stipulated that defeating or taking the surrender of the enemy was not enough and that total annihilation was necessary. In the following years, Couto e Silva’s ideas became established practice among the members of the Brazilian War College, the elite school for military officers in Brazil (Giannasi, 2011).

The Doctrine can be understood as one manifestation of an “authoritarian utopia” ideal that has a long tradition in Brazilian thought (Fico, 2004, p. 38-39). During the dictatorship, this belief justified assembling an ‘information complex’ to identify and eliminate the ‘enemy’, which, according to the military, could included anyone capable of jeopardising national security. The educational and cultural

effervescence of the 1950s and early 1960s was deeply affected by the imprisonment, torture and even murder of many intellectuals, social reformers and artists who had been labelled as subversive elements. The operatives responsible for these acts, however, lacked uniformity of vision, because there were significant differences and conflicts between them regarding the kind of government that Brazil should have (Fico, 2012).

The tendency towards authoritarianism, where a strong hand is seen as the solution to all society's problems, can also be connected to paternalism, one of the most influential ideologies in Brazil ever since the first years of colonisation. In this view, a small group of economically and culturally privileged people have continually seen themselves as the rightful leaders of the country, using the argument that the general populace, seen as the masses, do not have the necessary knowledge and understanding and therefore should not be allowed to enter into the deliberations to decide the future of the country (Freire, 1970/2005). This perception of reality is also characterised by a false sense of generosity in which benefits are handed out to the population in only limited quantity and quality so as not to allow any real change in the balance of power in society, thus sustaining an oppressive situation (Freire, 1970/2005).

The military government used a package of new legal measures called Institutional Acts to apply a veneer of legitimacy to the changes they promoted. These Acts were a series of executive orders that could create, alter or rescind any piece of legislation in the name of the battle against subversion and corruption. The First Act, introduced in 1964, established indirect elections by members of the National Congress for the office of President, and Presidential authority to deny

political rights for a period of ten years to anybody held under suspicion. The Second Act, which came in the following year, dissolved all political parties, while the Third, from 1966, extended indirect elections to state governorships. Finally, the Fourth Act, also from 1966, created a bipartisan system, polarising the political spectrum between the far right *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* – ARENA (National Renewal Alliance), which supported the military, and a broad coalition in opposition known as the *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* – MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement) (Brasil, 1964, 1965, 1966a, 1966b).

Tensions between the government and various social movements, which had been present since the coup, escalated in 1968. Organised labour had been affected by the dissolution of the *Central Geral dos Trabalhadores* (General Workers' Union), and by the abolition of the right to strike. Nevertheless, workers from the cities of Contagem (Minas Gerais) and Osasco (São Paulo) managed to organise strikes demanding autonomy of the unions and better wages and work conditions. The purpose of these actions was to advance a more radical approach to social activism in order to engage a larger number of workers against the regime. Although the first strike in Contagem achieved an initial compromise from the government in April, the following demonstrations were firmly repressed, and the leaders of the movement were left with the options of either leaving the country or going underground (Antunes & Ridenti, 2007).

At the same time, a widespread students' movement was involved in pushing forward the agenda for free public education for all and in criticising the reduction of individual freedoms and rights. Access to tertiary education was especially problematic, as many secondary school students who had reached the necessary

grades for entering public universities had their entry denied for lack of vacancies. In March, *Calabouço* (Dungeon), a restaurant in Rio de Janeiro attended mainly by students, was raided by the police, resulting in the death of the student Edson Luís de Lima Souto. Soon after this, demonstrations in favour of the students and against police violence were held in different cities, among them the *Passeata dos Cem Mil* (March of the Hundred Thousand) in Rio de Janeiro. The government responded with even more brutality, and in October all the students attending the *Congresso da União Nacional dos Estudantes* (Conference of the National Union of Students) were arrested (Antunes & Ridenti, 2007).

In September of the same year, Márcio Moreira Alves, Federal Deputy from MDB, gave an eloquent speech in the National Congress urging people to boycott the military parades scheduled for the next week. The military leadership, deeply offended, requested that criminal proceedings be opened to punish Alves. However, Alves had parliamentary immunity and could not be prosecuted without congressional authorisation. The senators and deputies voted against the request, 216 votes to 141, and Alves kept his immunity and his position as a Deputy (L. F. Silva, 2014).

Three months later, in December, the political dispute between the President and Congress, heated by the Alves case, took a decisive direction with the publication of Institutional Act No. 05, which increased the powers of the executive to new levels. The President gained the authority to close the National Congress, the State Legislative Assemblies, and the City Councils. The rights to parliamentary immunity and habeas corpus could also be suspended on grounds of national security. Additionally, all demonstrations of a political nature were prohibited (Brasil,

1968). As a consequence, congress was closed between December 1968 and October 1969, several politicians and judges lost their positions, and censorship of books, newspapers, song lyrics, among others, was increased.

Not everyone interpreted the Act in the same way. Fico (2004, p. 33-34), for example, points out that in certain contexts, especially in political memoirs, the Act was seen as “a coup inside a coup” where “hard-line” military personnel predominated over their more moderate colleagues, thereby starting a new and even more repressive period in the dictatorship. Fico goes on to argue, however, that recent research has shown that a “cleaning operation” against any form of dissent was on-going from the beginning of the dictatorship and that Act No. 5 was merely the result of a “ripening process” of the military government and not a product of internal struggles among the military nor simply a reactionary response to the events of 1968 (Fico, 2004, p. 33-34).

Codato (2004) similarly views the Act as the political consummation of the coup of 1964. For him, the dictatorship began as an authoritarian answer to a crisis, with the military lacking a coherent plan for ruling the country. However, the gradual militarisation of the state and the continuous concentration of power in the executive, which rose over the legislative and judiciary, consolidated the “domination of the military as an *institution*” and led to some clarification in the government policy agenda but not unanimous agreement about it (p. 18). He further posits the non-linear character of the dictatorship, which fluctuated between “cycles of repression” and “cycles of liberalisation” over the years from 1964 to 1985 (Codato, 2004).

Also in 1968, the *Assessoria Especial de Relações Públicas* (Special Advisory

Council for Public Relations) was created to improve the public image of the military government. In this council, directed by Colonel Octávio Costa, journalists, sociologists and psychologists worked to discredit any opposition to the regime and create a consensus around the idea of economic development (Napolitano, Luvizotto & Gonzales, 2014). Fortunately for the government, two years later, Brazil won the 1970 FIFA World Cup in Mexico, the first one to be broadcast live on television. The excitement around the Brazilian Football team spread over the country, even among those critical of the government. The then president, Emílio Garrastazu Médici, organised a special reception for the players, and the jingle “Suddenly it is that advancing chain. It seems that all Brazil is holding hands. All connected by the same emotion. All is one heart. All together, come on, Go ahead, Brazil, Brazil. Save the team!” was appropriated as a motto of the dictatorship (Marques & Ushinohama, 2014).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described a history of top-down authoritarian decisions in Brazil from the 1880s to the 1970s in which even the proclamation of the republic did not involve a popular uprising. Physical force and/or the use of supposed communist threats were common means employed to seize power. There were also frequent interventions by the military in the political fate of the country, with the ultimate move being the 1964 coup. These factors added to the mistrust and even the fear the ruling classes had of the people’s political aspirations and caused democracy to be suppressed. Public schooling, many times seen as the key to the country’s salvation, was consistently underfunded and consequently could not offer enough placements for the whole population even at the most basic levels. The

calls for the democratization of education in terms of expanding the number of vacancies did not necessarily follow a democratic process of discussion concerning curricula decisions and the goals for education, and movements where the communities were actively involved as subjects and not only objects of external policies, like those of the 1960s, were eventually repressed. This does not mean that Brazilians resigned themselves to authoritarian rule. Workers, teachers, students, politicians, lawyers, and members of the church, among many others, continued and still continue to fight against oppressive conditions.

Chapter 4

Education and culture under military control⁵

This chapter sets the scene for the analyses of conceptions of literacy and illiteracy presented in the following chapters. First, I discuss the government's cultural policies in general and the Ministry of Education and Culture in particular during the military dictatorship. Then, I discuss the curriculum reform of 1971 and the introduction of a new Law of Directives and Bases of Education, which extended elementary education from four to eight years while reducing secondary education from seven to three years. Finally, I address the transformations that took place in the working conditions of teachers, showing how persistent low levels of funding combined with growing enrolment numbers led to greater teacher workloads, while the reformulation of the curricula and the introduction of a range of standardised textbooks deskilled their activities.

4.1 The Ministry of Education and Culture

Following the principles of national security and national identity, the government acted mainly on three fronts within the field of cultural policy (Fernandes, 2013). First, there were concentrated efforts to break the leftist hegemony in the sector, particularly through censorship of the arts and media. Second, there were infrastructure investments that allowed the consolidation of industries involved in culture, especially the new national networks of television,

⁵ A version of Chapter Four was published in the *New Zealand Sociology Journal* (Vahl, 2017). Permission to reprint has been requested from the publisher.

which collaborated to promote the urban lifestyles of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo as ideal models for the rest of the country. Third, distinct governing bodies were created, like the *Conselho Federal de Cultura* (Federal Council for Cultural Matters), to elaborate and support a national policy for historical and cultural heritage (Fernandes, 2013).

The considerations made by Ridenti (2005) are useful when trying to understand the complexity of the leftist influence in the Brazilian cultural scene after the 1960s. Using Raymond Williams's concept of structure of feeling, Ridenti points out the emergence of a shared vision among a large number of Brazilian artists and intellectuals from the late 1950s onwards. This vision, he says, was based on a "revolutionary romanticism" which sought a "dis-alienation of consciousness" through literature, theatre, cinema, music, and other arts. The coup in 1964 frustrated this prospect, and Institutional Act No. 05 in 1968 gave the state further control over the production of cultural goods. The military government acted by censoring unwanted content and by elaborating "blacklists" containing the names of those perceived as subversive elements. However, many less threatening left-orientated artists and intellectuals had their work integrated and even funded by government bodies such as the Federal Council for Cultural Matters, the *Instituto Nacional do Livro* (National Book Institute) and the *Serviço Nacional de Teatro* (National Service of Theatre). This was especially true during and after the presidency of Ernesto Geisel (1975-1979) (Ridenti, 2005).

Although the military government's consolidation of national television networks modernised the broadcast media, it effectually "demodernised" the politics" by transforming the vibrant public space of Brazilian society into a two-

dimensional *faux* public arena where people were expected to act only as passive observers rather than active political beings (Bucci, 2016, p. 174). From 1964 to 1985 television became the main means of mass communication (Leal Filho, 2004). State support, either through paid advertisements or tax exemptions, gave the government access to the networks' resources to advance ideas like the so-called "Brazilian economic miracle." While many television news programmes worked on the basis of self-censorship, those companies that openly criticised the government suffered strict official censorship and even the imprisonment of their journalists (Leal Filho, 2004). In this context, President Emilio Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974) declared that he felt happy every night watching TV because "while the news reports strikes, riots, attacks and conflicts in various parts of the world, Brazil is moving, in peace, towards development" (Carvalho, 1979-1980, as cited in Leal Filho, 2004, p. 45). The only sustainable methods of criticising the dictatorship on television were indirect references in soap operas (Bucci, 2016) or in the musical lyrics sung in festivals being broadcast (Ridenti, 2005).

In general, the decision-making process in the state administrative structure was centralised and the majority of the positions of power within government, including the Ministry of Education and Culture, were taken over by military personnel or those closely aligned with the military. For example, Luís Antônio da Gama e Silva, professor of law at the *Universidade de São Paulo* (University of São Paulo) and a strong supporter of the coup, became the first Minister of Education and Culture for a brief period right after the military took control. Gama e Silva's successor, Flávio Suplicy Lacerda, Dean of the Federal University of Paraná in the 1950s, was likewise a coup supporter, as was Tarso de Moraes Dutra, an ARENA

member of the Chamber of Deputies, who took the role of Minister for much of 1967. Jarbas Passarinho, a lieutenant colonel in the army at the time of the coup and later an ARENA senator was Minister from 1969 to 1974 (after having been Minister of Work and Social Security for two years) and Ney Aminthas de Barros Braga, a former army major, succeed Passarinho as Minister from 1974 to 1978.

There is a widespread tendency in society to blame education for crises in other spheres, like the economy or politics (Apple 1979/2004; 1996). With the overthrow of the democratic government of President João Goulart, it was no different in Brazil. The military government used an inverted logic by proclaiming that it was not unequal social and economic conditions that created different educational outcomes, but problems in the educational process that generated social and economic inequalities (Cunha & Góes, 1991). Technocracy, understood as a form of government where technical experts and not the general population should choose the future of the country, became the guiding ideology (Ferreira Jr. & Bittar, 2008). With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the national curriculum was reformed first at the tertiary level in 1968 and then at the elementary and secondary levels in 1971. Progressive movements in popular education were repressed, and those who questioned the status quo were persecuted. Paulo Freire, for example, was taken into custody for more than seventy days and later left the country to ensure his own safety (Cortella, 2011, p. 5).

A technocratic approach was manifested in education through the influence of human-capital theory (Ferreira Jr. & Bittar, 2008). While the expression “human capital” dates only from the 1950s, studies of the “human element” in the

production of wealth had already appeared in the first decades of the 20th century (Saul, 2004, p. 240). Human-capital theory cannot be attributed to a single author or school of thought, but is better perceived as a “product” of the general “economic development” in the United States (pp. 257-258). One of the main exponents of the theory, Theodore W. Schultz, seeing people as a type of capital, developed a conceptual change where consumers became investors and consumption became investment (López-Ruiz, 2009). In Schultz’s view, every person could be seen as a capitalist, including members of the working class, because their investments in knowledge would yield economic value (Saul, 2004). This approach provided a strong connection between the economy and education, since expenditures in education were seen as investments made to generate higher levels of production and consumption (López-Ruiz, 2009). Schultz’s underlying argument was also based on an individualistic vision, where each person is responsible for their investments and consequently for their own success or failure (López-Ruiz, 2009).

Education in Brazil was seen through the lens of human-capital theory as an investment to increase worker productivity. Thus, students were expected to attend school to learn useful skills and, once integrated into the labour market, raise outputs. This economic logic – that the rewards for expenditures on education should be counted in monetary terms – was articulated, for example, by Senator Arnon Afonso de Farias Melo (ARENA, Alagoas), who, inspired by US ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith, stated that “a dollar spent on education yields more than one spent on in highways” (Congresso Nacional, Diários do Senado Federal [CN/DSF], 22/05/1973, p. 1302). The curriculum reforms were also inspired by the desire to make Brazil appear more urban and industrial (Ferreira Jr. & Bittar, 2008).

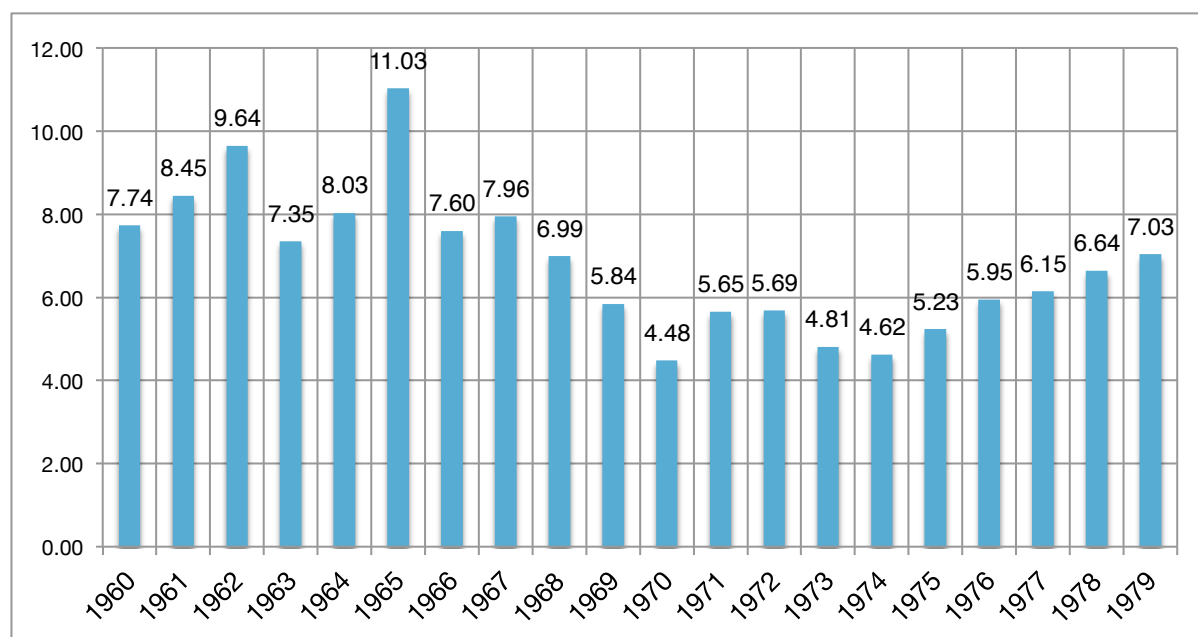
The large number of people with low formal educational training were perceived as an obstacle to economic growth. To overcome this problem, the government sought to universalise basic education, especially with a vocational focus — hence the reforms. Between 1971 and 1979 the number of enrolments rose from 17,066,093 to 22,025,449 in elementary education, from 1,119,421 to 2,658,078 in secondary education and from 561,397 to 1,311,799 in tertiary education, for an overall increase of 38% (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 1981, p. 202).

The growing number of students demanded more investment — to build new schools and classrooms and hire new teachers as well as to continue supporting the complex network of already existing schools. The proceedings of the National Congress show that many politicians, both from ARENA and from MDB, did in fact call for a higher level of investment in education. For example, Senator Franco Montoro (MDB, São Paulo), while complaining about the reduction of funds for education in percentage terms from the 1960s to the 1970s, argued that “education policy is the most powerful and fair instrument available to the government to promote economic, social and political development of the nation” and that the country would, therefore, benefit from reallocating some of the funds available for the development of “physical capital” to the development of “human capital” (CN/DSF, 07/09/1974, p. 3599). Similarly, Senator João Salmon (ARENA, Espírito Santo) criticised the shortsighted vision of some politicians who opted to invest in major construction projects instead of education. He further claimed that “there is no more profitable investment than education, although its results do not come instantly” and that with more resources for education “Brazil, without a doubt,

would fulfil its destiny of greatness” (CN/DSF, 14/10/1978, p. 5314). It is worth noting that Montoro and Calmon, like Farias Melo and many other politicians in the 1970s, used language connected with human-capital theory in their claims for more resources for education.

Despite the pleas coming from Congress, however, the budget in the Ministry of Education and Culture continued to fluctuate at unsatisfactory low levels. Limiting investments in education is a standard practice in dictatorial governments (Pinto, 2014). In Brazil, this was done by withholding budgetary resources reserved by law for education and by establishing alternative instruments of funding that favoured private schools at the expense of public institutions. The Brazilian national constitution of 1946 had decreed that at least 10% of federal tax revenues were to be invested in education and that at least 20% of state and municipal tax income should go to the same purpose. In 1967, this regulation, which had become increasingly problematic for the government, was entirely revoked. Two years later, in 1969, a new constitution re-established the 20% municipal tax allocation for education but not that at the state level nor the federal 10% contribution. Given the relatively small size of municipal tax takes, the funds raised were far short for the requirements (Pinto, 2014). The federal government pattern of spending in the Ministry of Education and Culture in the 1960s and 1970s can be seen in Figure 7:

Figure 7: Percentage of expenditure in the Ministry of Education in relation to the total revenues of the federal government in the years 1960 to 1979



Elaborated by the author based on IBGE (1962, pp. 337; 334; 1964, pp. 363; 367; 1966, pp. 504; 513; 1967, pp. 733; 741; 1969, pp. 662; 673; 1972, pp. 880; 887; 1973, p. 745; 1975, p. 771; 1977, p. 730; 1980, pp. 723; 730)

In Brazil, the vast majority of public elementary and second schools were funded and managed by the states and municipalities, while tertiary institutions were mostly run by the federal government. In 1971, for example, 56% of the schools offering elementary education were from the municipalities, 37% from the states, 6% from private institutions, and only 1% from the federal government (IBGE, 1972, p. 719). This arrangement allowed a greater local autonomy at the elementary and second levels but at the same time reduced the funding available to maintain those systems considering that the federal government has a higher tax collection than states and municipalities. It is important to understand that although the federal government was not directly responsible for providing elementary and secondary education, technical and financial support from the Ministry to the states and municipalities was crucial. From Figure 7, it is possible to see that the percentage of investments grew during some years. However, the pattern of

expenditure in the Ministry after 1966 was always below 8% of the total revenues of the federal government and sometimes as little as 4.48% in one period of exceptional enrolment expansion like the 1970s.

Another strategy adopted by the military regime to fund education was to implement the salary-education contribution, a tax based on a percentage of the minimum salary (Pinto, 2014). Through this contribution, private companies that had more than 100 staff became partly responsible for the education of their employees' children. The companies could choose between paying a tax, maintaining their own school, paying scholarships in private institutions or assisting their employees with a percentage of their children's tuition fees in private schools, with the last option being the most common. This approach resembled that of school choice, where public resources are diverted to fund privately owned schools. The substantial increase in enrolment numbers in public schools and the lack of funding to maintain those schools properly led to a loss of identity in the sector and a drop in quality, leading even more people from the middle class to opt for non-public institutions (Pinto, 2014).

4.2 Vocational training and the reformed elementary education

In the 1960s and 1970s, many of the major difficulties concerning education in Brazil were related to the high rate of illiteracy among all ages, the uneven distribution of schools across the country and the high dropout rates at all levels. Only 66.7% of school-age children were enrolled in any sort of educational institution by the end of the 1960s (CN/DSF, 04/12/1973, p. 5836). From a typical cohort starting the first grade of elementary education in 1961, less than 50% would

advance to the second grade (Ministério da Educação, Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira & [MEC/INEP] & Organização dos Estados Ibero-americanos para Educação, Ciência e Cultura [OEI], 2003, pp. 25-26). By the end of the four years of elementary education around 76.1% would have left of school. Of the same group, only 6.4% of students would have finished secondary education (MEC/INEP & OEI, 2003, pp. 25-26). The following table shows in detail the dropout rates between the years of 1961 and 1972:

Table 2: School dropout rates from any cohort of 1,000 students (1961-1972)

Year	Level of education	School grade	Number of students
1961	Elementary education	1st grade	1,000
1962		2nd grade	446
1963		3rd grade	328
1964		4th grade	239
1965	Secondary education - 1st cycle (<i>Ginásio</i>)	1st grade	152
1966		2nd grade	124
1967		3rd grade	106
1968		4th grade	91
1969	Secondary education - 2nd cycle (<i>Colegial</i>)	1st grade	96
1970		2nd grade	74
1971		3rd grade	64
1972	Tertiary education	1st grade	56

Source: MEC/INEP and OEI (2003, pp. 25-26)

In Congress, the reasons given by parliamentarians for this phenomenon varied, but the general feeling was that the high incidence of student failure and/or dropout made of the schools little more than “manufacturing plants of illiterate adults,” as was claimed by Federal Deputy Flexa Ribeiro (ARENA, Rio de Janeiro) (CN/DSF, suplemento, 28/07/1971, p. 72). Some politicians, such as Senator João

Calmon (ARENA, Espírito Santo), argued that one relevant factor was the poor skill levels of primary teachers, many of whom were working without any specific qualification (CN/DSF, 27/05/1971, p. 1518). Others, like Senator Ruy Santos (ARENA, Bahia), claimed that poor household conditions weighed more heavily because many students were forced to leave school to help support the family (CN/DSF, 27/05/1971, p. 1518). Santos further argued that although access to public education was free of charge, parents still needed to purchase books and uniforms, which could be quite expensive (CN/DSF, 09/07/1971, p. 2984).

Any analysis of school dropout rates, and the reasons students leave school before completion, is necessarily complex and multi-layered. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for politicians, the media and even researchers to blame students, parents or teachers before properly scrutinising the contexts that generate such results. Freire (2000, 2001, 2016) points out that the question as to why students leave school is often erroneously framed in terms of school evasion when in fact it should be examined through the lens of “school expulsion,” his term for the situation where students are expelled by pervasively adverse school environments. All too often students are labelled as “lazy and useless” without any inquiry into their physical and emotional health. Additionally, the discriminatory practices in academic environments against the syntax of the popular classes are frequently ignored, just as is the lack of respect shown for students’ individual identities and backgrounds. The case of school dropout is just one more instance (poverty, for example, would be another) where the dominant ideology instils into “the oppressed a sense of blame and culpability about their situation of oppression” (Freire, 2001, p. 77).

Cunha and Góes (1991) point out that with the publication of a new demographic census in Brazil in 1970, it became clear that the economic development of the country was not leading to a reduction of social and economic inequality. The explanation given by the supporters of the dictatorship and further perpetuated in the mass media was that the differences in the distribution of wealth were caused by differences in the educational level among the population. With this view, the government could portray education as the miraculous intervention that would inevitably bring about a better wealth distribution (Cunha & Góes, 1991). The military regime, therefore, argued that the solution to wealth inequality in Brazil was connected with the improvement of students' performance through curriculum reform.

An important aspect of this discussion is the activities of USAID in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s (Gaio, 2008). The Agency was created by John F. Kennedy in 1961 as a government body equipped to deal with situations that concerned the United States around the globe. In Latin America its actions focused on decreasing the impact of the Cuban revolution of 1959 and preventing the rise of new communist initiatives through the indiscriminate prescription of preconceived answers for achieving economic development. In Brazil, cooperation with USAID started in 1963, but was limited mainly to the state governments until the 1964 coup, after which the federal government became increasingly involved. The agreements settled upon involved technical, financial and military assistance, with US experts travelling to Brazil and Brazilians receiving training in the US (Gaio, 2008).

Regarding the Ministry of Education and Culture specifically more than

nineteen agreements were promulgated with USAID between 1964 and 1972, including provision of technical support for the reformulation of elementary, secondary and tertiary education curricula as well as for the production and distribution of textbooks (Gaio, 2008). The meetings to draft these agreements were closed to the public, governed by “secret procedures,” and held not in the public buildings of the Ministry but at undisclosed locations in the quarters of the American-Brazilian commissions (Lira, 2010, p. 211). The perspective adopted, closely aligned with human-capital theory, saw education as a product, one where the “output” of the educational process should match the needs of the market (Gaio, 2008).

Not everybody, however, agreed with this perspective, or with the influence of the United States on the future of Brazilian education. Students and teachers, especially those at the tertiary level, organised demonstrations against the reductionist understanding of education put forward by the reforms. In 1968, Federal Deputy Márcio Moreira Alves published a book publicising and criticising the content of the agreements. However, a couple of months later he became a target of government persecution, lost his public mandate as Deputy and had to leave the country for his own safety. One of the measures that helped the regime to control opposition from schools and universities was Decree-Law No. 477/1969, which outlawed teacher-or student-led resistance movements, including shutdown actions or the distribution of printed material considered subversive by the military (Brasil, 1969).

In elementary and secondary education, a working group gathered in 1969 to elaborate the requirements of curriculum reform. A year later, in 1970, a new group

was created to broaden and update the reform aims. In March 1971 Jarbas Passarinho, then Minister of Education and Culture, sent the completed proposal to President Emílio Garrastazu Médici (Gaio, 2008; Lira, 2010). In June of that year, the draft legislation for changes to elementary and secondary education was presented to the National Congress for discussion. A mixed committee, comprising ten senators and eight federal deputies from ARENA and one senator and three federal deputies from MDB, was appointed to analyse the bill. After a favourable recommendation from the committee, it was passed into law in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate with little debate or criticism (Lira, 2010). The Law of Directives and Bases of National Education No. 5.692/1971 extended elementary education from four to eight years while reducing secondary education from seven to three years, as shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Educational structure before and after the Law 5.692/1971

BEFORE THE REFORM		
Level	Length	Age group
Childhood education	3 years	4 - 6 years
Elementary education	4 years	7 - 10 years
Secondary education (Ginásio)	4 years	11 - 14 years
Secondary education (Colégio)	3 years	15 - 17 years
Tertiary education	Variable	After 18 years

AFTER THE REFORM		
Level	Length	Age group
Childhood education	3 years	4 - 6 years
Elementary education (mandatory)	8 years	7 - 14 years
Secondary education	3 years	15 - 17 years
Tertiary education	Variable	After 17 years

Source: MEC/INEP and OEI (2003, p. 26)

The purpose of education for the military was to produce “human resources for economic development within the capitalist order parameters” (Saviani, 2007, p. 342). Within the structure of the new law, mandatory elementary education would provide a minimum of training to all, while secondary education, with a compulsory vocational focus, would lead to a basic technical qualification. Finally, tertiary education, with short and long courses, would produce a highly qualified workforce (Gaio, 2008). In elementary education, the idea of developing human resources for the working market was implemented by reducing the class hours devoted to the humanities and by excluding philosophy and sociology entirely from the curriculum (Saviani, 2007). In secondary education, the goal was to increase the number of people receiving technical qualifications on the grounds that providing vocational training at this level would lessen public demand for tertiary education (Lira, 2010).

The new Law of Directives and Bases of National Education made the link between basic education and the labour market stronger, with the early years of elementary education providing a “general education” and the later years preparing students for the “initiation to work” (Brasil, 1971). Senator Jarbas Passarinho (ARENA, Pará), Minister of Education and Culture at the time of the reform, for example, stated that one of his objectives was to avoid an overly academic curriculum that would be “distant from the needs of the labour market” (CN/DSF, 04/12/1973, p. 5836). Senator Heitor Dias (ARENA, Bahia), for his part, urged his fellow congressional colleagues to admit that before the reform “education was, as everyone here has said in so many words, absolutely ‘bookish’, abandoning, therefore, the national reality” (CN/DSF, 01/05/1975, p. 1506).

Table 4 compares the population growth in the 5-19 year age group and the

enrolment growth in elementary and secondary education in 1970 and 1980:

Table 4: Comparison of the population between 5 and 19 years old with the levels of enrolment in elementary and secondary education in 1970 and 1980

	1970	1980
Population between 5 and 14 years	25,318,627	29,037,063
Population between 15 and 19 years	10,253,283	13,575,971
Enrolment in elementary education	15,894,627	22,148,809
Enrolment in secondary education	1,003,475	2,823,544
Total enrolment	16,898,102	24,972,353

Source: Elaborated by the author based on IBGE (1974, p. 39; 1981, p. 202; 1982, pp. 213, 222; 1985, p. 60)

When analysing Table 4, one point must be made. The age group covered by the census data, 5 to 14 years, does not exactly match the age range of children attending elementary education, which was 7 to 10 years in 1970 and 7 to 14 years in 1980. Nevertheless, it is clear that there was an increase in the proportion of children enrolled over the period. However, elementary education remained unavailable to many in Brazil. One-third of all children between 7 and 10 years of age were not in school in 1980 (Cunha & Góes, 1991, pp. 56-57). The schooling rate (the percentage of all children of any given group actually enrolled in school) for the first four years of elementary education in fact dropped from 66.3% to 65.5% between 1970 and 1980, with reductions from 82.7% to 79.9% in the cities and 48.5% to 42.5% in the countryside. In the group between 7 to 14 years, the absolute number of those without access to school grew from 6.5 million in 1970 to 7.5 million in 1980 (Cunha & Góes, 1991, pp. 56-57).

Moreover, even for those children who were in school, the conditions were

often far from satisfactory. Senator Evelásio Vieira (MDB, Santa Catarina), for instance, while complaining about 500 children having to study on the floor due to a lack of school tables, argued that this situation in the state of Santa Catarina was probably not the exception but the rule in the countryside (CN/DSF, 01/05/1975, p. 1506). In Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco it was possible to find the same space functioning as a football club, a nightclub and a primary school (*Nova escola, aulas de trabalho*, 1971, p. 52). In the city of Santo André, located in the richest state in Brazil – São Paulo – an outbreak of scabies spread through the schools, with more than 150 children infected in only one institution. In this case, the explanation provided by the Health Division of the City Council was that scabies in schools was caused more by the fact that most of the students lived in slums than by a lack of cleaning staff, even though more than 60 establishments were in such poor state that they needed to be disinfected (*Combate à sarna em escolas municipais*, 1973, p. 25).

By the end of the 1970s, pressures to make the regime more open and overcome military rule gained political traction. Calls for a more inclusive and democratic school system became increasingly common in Congress and the print media. However, the emphasis in education on training people, usually to perform low-skill jobs and preferably without questioning their position in society, was still strong. The argument for expanding enrolment numbers was constantly jeopardised by the suspicion of loss in quality, as can be seen in the speech of Senator Aderbal Jurema (ARENA, Pernambuco), who stated that “we have to ensure the quality of education. No one more than I wants Brazilian education to be democratised, with the opportunity to study for everyone; but we need to be very careful with this

democratisation” (CN/DSF, 25/05/1979, p. 2077). It is possible to argue that this fear of a drop in the quality of education was associated with another fear, one of losing further control of the lower classes once they had access to such basic social rights as elementary education.

4.3 The working conditions of teachers

Throughout the dictatorship, there was a *proletarianization* of teachers’ work, characterised by Apple as “a loss of control and a separation of conception from execution” (1986, p. 32). Gender is a significant aspect of this discussion, considering that most teachers in Brazil, then as now, were women, especially in elementary education, and that “work that is done by women (...) is unfortunately often subject to lower pay, less respect and autonomy, and more social blame” (Apple, 1999, p. 12). Finally, there is an ideological aspect of teachers’ proletarianization in that it can represent a loss of the social meaning of their work and of the purposes of education (Contreras, 2002).

After the coup, teacher education programmes were restructured, with Normal Schools, the standard course until that moment, being replaced by a teaching certification that was only one among many vocational options at the secondary level (Tanuri, 2000). In tertiary education, aspiring teachers could opt for a short degree of three years, which certified them to work in elementary education, or a full degree of four years, which allowed them to work both in elementary and secondary education. The efforts to “modernize” teaching focused on planning, controlling and evaluating activities and on the integration of audio-visual resources in classrooms, all of which reduced teaching to the mere application of techniques (Tanuri, 2000).

Increasing enrolment numbers combined with chronic low levels of funding at a time of rising inflation reduced the purchasing value of teachers' wages. As a result, as Lira (2010) points out, many teachers had to increase their working hours, thereby reducing the time available for other job-related activities such as personal study. It was a double loss for teachers: a decrease of salaries, on the one hand, and an increase in working hours, on the other (Clark, Nascimento & R. A. Silva, 2006). Furthermore, because teachers needed to work longer hours and lacked time to follow the latest advances in education, they became more dependent on knowledge produced and framed for them by others. The end result was an intensification of teachers' labour, comprehended as a deterioration of working conditions (Apple, 1986). However, teachers were not alone in their financial losses, as the government monetary policy kept wage increases generally below inflation rates.

With work intensification, "quality is sacrificed for quantity" and pride in teaching "is jeopardized as the work becomes dominated by someone else's conception of what should be done" (Apple & Jungck, 1990, p. 235). This being the case during the dictatorship in Brazil, it is not surprising that the social status of teachers deteriorated (Hebling, 2013). This was not only because of wage losses but also because of a change in teacher demographics. Until the 1960s, most teachers were from the middle and upper classes, and teachers' associations focused mainly on social and leisure activities. With an increasing need for educators and the new three-year degrees in tertiary education, more working-class people became teachers (Ferreira Jr. & Bittar, 2006). This upward social mobility in the profession was observed by teachers themselves. For example, one teacher

employed on the outskirts of São Paulo in 1980 noted that “those who would be a clerk, an industrial and others, years ago, today are educators” (Mello, Maia & Britto, 1983, p. 73).

Teachers from the working class, however, were often accused of having an inappropriate cultural background to teach. This encouraged the view that the decline in the quality of public education was to be blamed on teachers themselves rather than on other factors, including the reductionist view of education adopted by the government, increases in enrolment numbers without corresponding rises in funding, the meagre material conditions of schools, and the widespread political and cultural repression of the time. In 1978 the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*, for example, described teachers as both “poorly organized as a professional category” and “deprived of a critical view of the world,” saying further that they could also be held accountable, “albeit indirectly, for the general crisis of education” (Paula, 2007, pp. 163-164). The government’s proposed solution called for greater control over education and teachers.

The deskilling of a profession is defined by “attempts to control both the content of that job and how it is done from the outside” (Apple, 1986, p. 56). This is what happened with teachers in Brazil. After the coup, managerial techniques propagated by “experts” became central to the learning process at the expense of teacher and student aspirations and demands, causing a division between those who plan and those who execute (Clark, Nascimento & R. A. Silva, 2006). As explained by Macedo, “the intellectual dimension of teaching is never celebrated by a system whose main objective is to further de-skill teachers and reduce them to mere technical agents who are destined to walk unreflectively through a labyrinth of

procedures” (Macedo, in Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 124). Teachers were excluded from the decision-making process and were expected merely to follow the guidelines handed down by the federal, state and municipal departments of education (Lira, 2010). Additionally, the government implemented national initiatives for the distribution of textbooks to ensure a standardisation of teaching across the country. First, through the *Comissão do Livro Técnico e do Livro Didático* (Technical Book and Textbook Commission) established in 1966, the government, with technical and financial support of the USAID, purchased from different private publishers titles pre-approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Then, in 1971, the Commission was replaced by the *Programa do Livro Didático* (Textbook Programme), which introduced the co-publishing of textbooks by the government and private companies.

During the dictatorship, teachers at all levels were evaluated and controlled, not only as regards the content and methodology of their classes but also with respect to their political participation. Undercover agents were assigned to report any “subversive activities,” and many teachers lost their jobs, were arrested or, at worst, completely disappeared (Ramos & Stampa, 2016). Additionally, specific legislation was created to repress teacher and student movements, with many universities consequently being raided by the police and the military (Lira, 2010). One teacher, for example, declared having a “feeling of being permanently filmed, permanently recorded” (Dalpiaz, 2009, p. 71). Social isolation was another problem. A teacher wanting to be identified only as “Lívia” described becoming “kind of paranoid, with a fear of persecution” because anybody could be an agent of the repression, deciding that it was best “do not make friends with anyone you do not

know, because you may be bringing the agents of the dictatorship to you” (Hebling, 2013, p. 108).

Despite the government’s persistent repressive actions, which included prison sentences and even torture, many teachers remained committed to opposing the dictatorship, both inside and outside of the classroom. The resistance of the teachers, however, must be carefully analysed to avoid either romanticizing their participation or overlooking important individual differences. Some educators ignored and were ignored by the dictatorship, as Pinheiro (2006) has demonstrated, while others actually assisted the repression as shown by the cases of two school principals who denounced teachers under their supervision to the police with allegations of subversion (A. R. Gomes, 2015; Hebling, 2013). There were also different motivations for the engagement of teachers in the resistance, ranging from the fight for better salaries and indignation over the lack of freedom of expression, to the wish for a more just distribution of wealth among the population. The critique of the dictatorship, for the most part, had to be very subtle, with one teacher commenting that “if you said anything against the military, you were arrested, so we said things, but it had to be done in a very discreet way” (Peron, 2014, p. 112). In the classrooms, many teachers, in their own words, tried to help “students to cultivate the habit of examining the facts [and] of making a criticism and a self-criticism” (Peron, 2014, p. 132), and despite “using those [government supplied] textbooks” did their best to discuss “the ideological position of the author of the text” (Dalpiaz, 2008, p. 77).

Outside of school, teachers filed lawsuits against their state governments demanding the enforcement of labour laws (Paula, 2007); some organised

demonstrations against the government (Peron, 2014); others spied on their military husbands (Dalpiaz, 2008); and still others underwent guerrilla training and joined the armed struggle (Hebling, 2013). Additionally, by the end of the 1970s, many teachers' associations, those already existing as well as many new ones, became unionised movements engaged in strikes and other political activity, despite the regime's efforts to inhibit them (Ferreira Jr. & Bittar, 2006). Finally, teachers were also an important part of the movements for the return of exiles persecuted by the dictatorship in the late 1970s and for the reestablishment of direct elections for president in the 1980s.

4.4 Conclusion

Freire argues that “no oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why?” (1970/2005, p. 86). The agenda that was adopted by the military government presents a clear illustration of Freire's words. This chapter has shown how, after the 1964 coup, the military established an authoritarian educational model where several key aspects played a part. First, the military government worked to silence groups that could mount an organised opposition, even employing the use of prison and torture. Second, preconceived solutions for development, mainly advanced by US scholars or US supporters in Brazil, were implemented through cooperative agreements with USAID. Third, curricula at all levels were reformulated to serve the interests of capital. In the economic logic fostered by human-capital theory, knowledge is not seen as a means of developing people's capacities, but as a tool to reduce the cost of work and increase productivity earnings (Saul, 2004). Fourth, teachers lost their autonomy to a great extent. On the one hand, both their credibility as professionals and their ability to

make decisions were undermined. On the other, textbook programmes were portrayed as the perfect standardised means of improving teaching. Fifth, students were forced to adopt passive attitudes where conflicts were to be avoided and divergent voices eliminated. The authoritarian educational model, which can be seen in Freirean terms as a kind of anti-dialogical cultural action of conquest and manipulation (Freire, 1970/2005), fostered an effective pedagogy of oppression that dehumanised the people.

Chapter 5

Literacy in the face of social oppression

This chapter analyses literacy learning in the face of social oppression in Brazil. First, I present statistical data on literacy levels from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1970s, comparing trends by region, skin colour⁶, and gender. Second, I examine Lourenço Filho's and Poppovic's psychological approaches to literacy learning with respect to early childhood and regular elementary education and discuss the ways in which poverty was cited as the reason for children not progressing in school. Also important to this discussion is the *Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização* - MOBRAL (Brazilian Literacy Movement), the nation-wide governmental body founded during the military dictatorship to raise literacy levels among teenagers and adults. A detailed analysis of its activities will be presented in the following chapter.

5.1 Statistics of literacy and social inequalities

Census data are never objective but are rather a social construct, where the inclusion or exclusion of a question, whether it be about literacy, skin colour or religion, reflects the issues of the day of the society, or at least part of the society, at a certain time (J. S. Oliveira, 2003). In Brazil, the process of collecting census

⁶ In Brazil, the notion of race is interwoven with the notion of skin colour, where the classification of people by their skin is seen as a natural and objective phenomenon (Guimarães, 2005). Thus, colour functions "as a metaphor of 'race'", and race works "as an analytical category built on the concept of 'colour'" (Senkevics, Machado & Oliveira, 2016, p. 10). An indicator of this phenomenon is the Brazilian census. The government has been collecting data, although irregularly, about the population's skin colour – and not, for example, race or ethnicity – since 1872.

data involves each household in the country being visited by a census officer. In these visits, one person per house is interviewed, providing the information for all the inhabitants of that residence. The data collected are confidential and can be used only for statistical purposes.

The Brazilian Government has been collecting data about literacy levels since 1872. The first criterion employed was the self-declaration of the interviewees to the question: Do you know how to read and write? The creation of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in 1938, meant that the government had a dedicated body responsible for the systematic collection, compilation and analysis of statistical data. In the 1940 census, and in compliance with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) guidelines, the Institute slightly broadened the enquiry about literacy, changing the question to whether one knew how to read and write a simple note (Ferraro, 2011).

There are some limitations regarding the statistical data about literacy that need to be taken into account. The first one concerns the variability in the interpretation of the question posed to the public, i.e., that of whether one is able to read and write or is able to read and write a simple *note*. The interpretation of what exactly these sentences mean can vary, changing the final results. Second, taking into account the impact of the social prejudice against the non-literate, the interviewees might have felt embarrassed to admit their lack of reading and writing abilities, which could mean that the numbers of non-literate people were higher than reported. Finally, the narrowness of the response, considering that the question by itself was not developed to show any variation in the levels of engagement with the

written culture but simply to provide a restrictive yes or no answer. Nevertheless, these statistics are still a useful instrument when looking for general trends.

Table 5 - Literacy levels among the population over 15 years old in Brazil (1920 - 1970)

	1920	1940	1950	1960	1970
Know how to read and write	6,155,567	10,379,990	14,916,779	24,259,284	35,586,771
Do not know how to read and write	11,401,715	13,269,381	15,272,632	15,964,852	18,146,977
Not declared	-	60,398	60,012	54,466	274,856

Source: Data excerpted from IBGE (1982, p. 74)

In the period 1920 to 1970, there was a consistent increase in the percentage of people over 15 years old declaring that they knew how to read and write: 35.1% in 1920, 43.8% in 1940, 49.3% in 1950, 60.3% in 1960, and 65.9% in 1970. These data, however, must be carefully analysed. Although illiteracy rates were indeed falling, the actual number of people unable to read and write was also continuously growing (Ferraro, 2002, 2009). This steady expansion in the numbers of non-literate people as the general population grew demonstrates that even the younger age groups still did not have universal access to schooling. Between the years 1920 and 1970, for example, the number of those declaring an inability to read and write jumped from 11,401,715 to 18,146,977, a difference of more than six million persons (IBGE, 1982, p. 74).

Table 6 - Percentage of the population over 5 years old declaring reading and writing abilities, categorised by sex, region and zone (Census of 1970)

Region	Men					
	Urban zone			Rural zone		
	Know how to read and write	Do not know how to read and write	Not declared	Know how to read and write	Do not know how to read and write	Not declared
North	74.8	24.2	1.0	39.9	58.8	1.3
Northeast	60.0	39.2	0.8	24.4	74.6	1.0
Southeast	82.1	17.0	0.9	53.3	45.7	1.0
South	83.0	16.1	0.9	63.7	35.2	1.1
Midwest	74.4	24.8	0.9	45.0	53.9	1.1
Total	77.0	22.1	0.9	43.4	55.6	1.0

Region	Women					
	Urban zone			Rural zone		
	Know how to read and write	Do not know how to read and write	Not declared	Know how to read and write	Do not know how to read and write	Not declared
North	73.1	26.0	0.9	35.2	63.3	1.5
Northeast	58.3	41.0	0.8	24.7	74.2	1.0
Southeast	76.4	22.7	0.8	46.8	52.1	1.0
South	78.8	20.3	0.8	58.4	40.4	1.2
Midwest	69.5	29.6	0.9	39.8	59.0	1.2
Total	72.2	26.9	0.8	39.4	59.5	1.1

Source: Data excerpted from IBGE (1974, pp. 90-91)

The literacy rates between the different regions in the country vary significantly. The states in the South and Southeast show higher levels of literacy in all metrics when compared to those in the Northeast, while the states in the Midwest and the North present intermediate rates between those two extremes. For

more than three centuries after the beginning of colonisation, all states had similar high levels of illiteracy, and the wealth generated by the exportation of products such as sugar cane, cotton and coffee had little effect on literacy rates (Ferraro, 2009). However, this changed during the second half of the 19th century due to differences in the historical process of land occupation and exploration, where the prevailing systems of large landholdings presented major obstacles to literacy learning in Brazil (Ferraro, 2009).

In the final years of the 19th century the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, both in the South, received waves of European migrants, many of whom were already literate, and who, once in Brazil, were organised into a coherent system of small rural family properties (Ferraro, 2009). One might argue that the literacy rates in these states started to improve only because of the addition of these new literate groups to the general population. However, São Paulo, in the Southeast, presents a different case. São Paulo had also received Europeans immigrants, but these to work in the coffee plantations. In that state, the arrival of the new immigrants brought about no major transformation in the overall access of the population to literacy, as there was no need for reading and writing abilities in the plantation system. It was only after the decline of coffee production due to the stock market crash of 1929 and the state's turn to industrialisation that São Paulo experienced a rapid reduction of illiteracy levels (Ferraro, 2009).

Rio de Janeiro State, also in the Southeast, presented a third dynamic in comparison with Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and São Paulo. The capital of the country was located there from 1763 until 1960, benefiting the population with the concentration of political power, state bureaucracy and educational

opportunities available in the capital, and resulting in better literacy rates (Ferraro, 2009). In this way, the rise in literacy levels in the South and Southeast was driven by changes in the broad political and economic structure of the states that moved them away from the systems of large landholdings, those changes being variously the establishment of settlements based on small landholding in Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, the need for a more literate workforce to join the factories in São Paulo, and the stronger participation, relative to other states, of the national government in Rio de Janeiro.

Another aspect of the discussion of regional disparities relates to the distribution of wealth. Rosemberg and Piza (1996), in their analysis of the 1990 census, demonstrate that if a person received more than twice the value of the minimum salary, there was no correlation between their geographical location and their access to literacy. However, for those below this salary level, the general concentration of wealth, or lack thereof, in a given region was decisive as regards the educational opportunities that were available. Illiteracy in Brazil, therefore, is also “the product of the exclusion of impoverished populations from social services, especially education” (Rosemberg & Piza, 1996, p. 115). There are no data available from the 1970 census that would allow a comparison between literacy levels and wealth, but household income was likely to have been a critical factor affecting people’s access to education.

The difference between the literacy rates in urban and rural zones was also significant, with 74.6% of those living in urban zones in 1970 considering themselves able to read and write a simple note, but only 41.4% of those residing in the countryside giving the same response. This disparity can be traced back to the

large concentration of land in the hands of a few wealthy owners. In the Brazilian scenario of large land holdings, there was not much support for literacy education, much less for literacy learning with a critical perspective. As Freire (1974/2013, p. 105) argues, “the *latifundist* structure, which is colonial by nature, enables the landlord (because of strength and prestige) to extend his ‘possession’ over the people as well as over the land,” and, as possessions, people suffer from “an interminable series of limitations which diminish their field of free acting.” If people are seen as objects, there is no need to foster their potentialities, only to take advantage of their labour.

The difficulties experienced by the population of rural areas, related to the limited educational and employment opportunities available, made the cities, with a less stratified society, look like a better option for a significant part of the population. The charm of the city brought about an extensive exodus from the rural areas during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The Southeast, for example, lost 43.16% of its rural population from 1960 to 1970 and 40.35% from 1970 to 1980 (Alves, Souza & Marra, 2011, p. 82). There were also difficulties in the Northeast, where droughts and water rationing led to significant internal migration towards the Southeast. The incorporation of these migrants into urban populations was not without conflict. Many of those looking for better living and working conditions in the cities ended up in precarious employment and housing conditions. Additionally, the economic model employed by the military government, one based on integrating Brazil into the international market, exacerbated the already unequal distribution of wealth (Oliveira, 2003).

Another aspect that must be addressed is the large contrast in literacy levels between people of different race⁷ and skin colour. Guimarães (2003, p. 95) argues that to understand race and skin colour in Brazil, it is necessary to distinguish the difference between a “native” concept and an “analytical” concept. While native concepts are used in practical ways to give meaning to the world, analytical concepts work within the “body of a theory.” Race was for a long time a native concept in Brazil, establishing that black people were to be socially positioned as slaves, and that such positioning was justified in terms of a “civilizing mission” (p. 99). With the end of slavery, the main native concept became skin colour as one of the means of better assimilating black and indigenous populations into the free workforce (Guimarães, 2003). Skin colour offers a larger fluidity than race, apprehending “the continuous aspects of Brazilian racial concepts in which groups shade into one another” (Telles, 2006, p. 79). Additionally, this increased flexibility in classification was possible because there was no formal segregation between whites and non-whites after the end of slavery in Brazil, as had happened, for example, in the United States and South Africa. Thus, with no legal requirement for clear distinctions based on race, there was no need to establish a rigid system of classification (Telles, 2006).

Data about the skin colour of the population were first collected in the Brazilian census of 1872 and then again in the census of 1890 (Beltrão, 2003; Senkevics, Machado & Oliveira, 2016). In the 20th century, it was only in the census of 1940, the first one conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and

⁷ The concept of race was largely abandoned in the field of biology after the Second World War, and even its application in social sciences suffered a series of criticisms because the baggage attached to it was considered by some capable of reproducing inequalities (Guimarães, 2005). However, I would agree with Guimarães that the notion remains useful as a way to understand discriminatory practices and discourses that are based on a racist ideology.

Statistics, that data about skin colour was again collected. The options available to the population through self-declaration were *branco* (white), *preto* (black) and *amarelo* (yellow), the last one being included in the census in response to the sizeable Asian immigration that took place in the early part of the century. Anyone who did not feel appropriately identified by any of the three alternatives available was advised to strike out a line in that section of the form. Those persons were later categorised as *pardos* (brown). The following censuses continued to use the same system, but with four colour options. There was no specific category for the indigenous population, a situation that remained unchanged until 1991 (Beltrão, 2003; Senkevics, Machado & Oliveira, 2016). Table 7 presents data on the population over ten years old, categorised by skin colour and sex, who declared themselves able to read and write:

Table 7 - Percentage of the population over 10 years old, categorised by skin colour and sex from 1940 to 1970, who declared themselves able to read and write

	Total		White		Black		Yellow		Brown	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1940	46.67	36.36	56.14	45.45	24.11	16.02	71.52	52.83	32.73	23.55
1950	50.70	42.34	61.25	52.44	28.23	21.07	85.36	74.83	35.79	28.46
1960	63.65	56.97	72.75	66.22	39.74	33.33	90.63	83.60	43.86	38.33
1970	68.80	63.94	80.18	75.64	51.03	45.55	92.07	86.81	53.93	50.46

Source: Data excerpted by the author from Beltrão (2003, p. 44)

Four points must be made about Table 7. First, the census collection of data about skin colour involved a complex subjective process of self-declaration on the part of the interviewees, where sometimes a “whiter” skin colour was associated with higher social status and economic position (Rosemberg & Piza, 1996). Unlike in the United States, race and skin colour in Brazil is not determined by ancestry —

the “one drop of blood rule” — but mainly through physical characteristics (Rosemberg & Piza, 1996, p. 112). Nor does self-identification always correspond to external perceptions of skin colour (Telles, 2006). A survey in 1995, for example, shows that while those who self-declared as ‘white’ were perceived around 90% of the time as ‘white’ by their interviewers, the correspondence in the answers of interviewees and interviewers dropped to 71% for those who self-identified as ‘brown’ and to only 59% for those who self-identified as ‘black’ (Telles, 2006, p. 90).

Second, the data about skin colour originally collected by the Institute reflected only a 25% sample of the population, while the results shown in Table 7 are percentages extrapolated from the original data by Beltrão to the whole population (Beltrão, 2003). In this way, the extrapolated sample could present distortions in relation to actual percentages of the literacy levels of the population by skin colour. However, such distortions are likely to be minor considering the methodology employed by the Institute to collect the data. There was in general great care taken to survey the population across the country and at all economic levels, generating a useful sample for extrapolation.

Third, as the census of 1970 did not collect any information about skin colour, Beltrão used the data from previous and later censuses in a “logical model” to estimate percentages for 1970. There is no clear explanation for why this data was not collected in 1970, but it is plausible that the dictatorship was unwillingly to call much attention to issues involving social inequality, including race. In fact, as a way to lessen pressures for social change, the military government embraced the idea that Brazilians lived in a “racial democracy,” a concept made popular by the influential book *Casa Grande e Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves) of Gilberto

Freyre, published in the 1930s (Telles, 2006). Also, the government had proclaimed the absence of “racial discrimination” in Brazil, and researchers who dared to question this view were eventually forced into exile (Telles, 2006, pp. 40-41).

Finally, the effects of miscegenation must be taken into account in the discussion about race and skin colour in Brazil. From the early years of colonisation, a large number of formal, informal and even violent relationships were established between whites and non-whites, especially among Portuguese men and indigenous or African women (Telles, 2006). Through the lens of “white supremacy,” this mixing of races was seen as a degradation of whites. However, by the 19th century the prevailing view was that miscegenation could actually solve the racial problem of the country. It was believed that the mixing of the perceived superior race – white – with the inferior ones – black and brown – would eventually bring about a broad “whitening” of the whole population. In the 20th century, Brazil did in fact present higher rates of interracial marriage than the United States. For example, Telles shows that “whites are [only] 2.6 times as likely to marry whites rather than blacks or browns in Brazil, while the comparable ration is over 50 for the United States” (p. 193). However, those marriages were not widely spread across economic levels, they happened mainly between poor whites and browns, keeping a wall to the inclusion of non-whites by marriage into the middle class (Telles, 2006).

Considering the data presented in Table 7, all skin colour groups increased their rates of literacy from 1940 to 1970, but with a significant variation among them. The groups ‘yellow’ and ‘white’ were always overrepresented in the literacy levels, while the groups ‘brown’ and ‘black’ were always underrepresented. Beltrão’s 1970 estimate shows average literacy rates by skin colour to be 89.44%

for the yellow group, 77.91% for the white, 52.19% for the brown and only 48.29% for the black. The disparity is even more visible when the rates of yellow and white men are compared with those of brown and black women: yellow men and white men had rates of 92.07% and 80.18%, respectively, while those for brown women and black women were only 50.46% and 45.55% (Beltrão, 2003, p. 44).

Taking into consideration that people with black or brown skin colour have, in general, lower incomes in Brazil, class remains an important aspect of the problem of inequality, but not the only one. Race relationships in Brazil far too often conform to the myth of “racial democracy,” where social or economic distinctions tend to be explained only in terms of class differences (Rosemberg & Piza, 1996). This reductionist focus on class trivialises race inequality as a mere byproduct of the slavery period rather than seeing it as an important ongoing contemporary issue (Lovell, 1995). Hasenbalg and N. V. Silva (1990), for example, basing their analysis on the *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra Domiciliar* (National Home Sampling Survey) of 1982, show that a higher percentage of black and brown children never attended school, as compared with white children, even when their families were located in the same salary range, although the difference between the groups became smaller as the income bracket increased. Furthermore, Telles (2006), using the data from the 1991 census, identifies a difference between the academic achievement of multiracial siblings, especially among boys. He explains that, at 10 years old, “47 percent of the whites in the sample are in the age-appropriate grade compared to 37 percent of their nonwhite brothers” (p. 149). In this way, regardless of class and even family, race is an important indicator of educational inequality in Brazil (Telles, 2006).

In relation to gender, broad access to literacy was not a reality for either men or women. However, the percentage of men who answered that they knew how to read and write a simple note in 1970 was higher than that of women in all urban areas and in all but one rural area, the exception being the rural Northeast, where the percentage for women was 0.7% larger than that for men. Country-wide, the difference between the rates of men and women over 15 years old was 4.4%. Nevertheless, it is useful to look into the data by sex and age group, as shown by Table 8.

Table 8 - Percentage of the population over 5 years old declaring reading and writing abilities categorised by sex and age group (Census of 1970)

	Know how to read and write		Do not know how to read and write		Not declared	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
5 to 9 years	28.8	30.2	68.2	66.8	3.0	3.0
10 to 14 years	68.3	71.8	31.2	27.7	0.5	0.5
15 to 19 years	74.0	76.8	25.7	22.9	0.3	0.3
20 to 24 years	74.2	72.2	25.5	27.5	0.3	0.3
25 to 29 years	72.3	67.4	27.5	32.3	0.2	0.3
30 to 34 years	72.0	64.9	27.8	34.7	0.2	0.3
35 to 39 years	70.1	60.3	29.7	39.4	0.2	0.3
40 to 44 years	67.7	57.5	32.1	42.2	0.2	0.3
45 to 49 years	65.3	53.3	34.5	46.4	0.2	0.3
50 to 54 years	61.9	48.2	37.9	51.5	0.2	0.3
55 to 59 years	61.1	46.9	38.7	52.8	0.2	0.3
60 to 64 years	57.2	41.5	42.6	58.1	0.3	0.4
65 to 69 years	56.9	41.4	42.8	58.2	0.3	0.5
70 years and over	49.5	35.1	47.4	62.0	3.2	2.9
Ignored aged	34.0	30.4	22.4	29.0	43.6	40.7

	Know how to read and write		Do not know how to read and write		Not declared	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Total	62.0	58.7	37.1	40.4	0.9	0.9

Source: Data excerpted by the author from the IBGE (1974, p. 58)

As in Table 6, the overall percentages favoured men, with 62.0% declaring themselves able to read and write, compared to only 58.7% for women. This was particularly true for those 40 years old and above, where the difference ranged between 10.3% and 15.7%. Women in younger age groups, between 5 to 19 years old, however, exhibited higher literacy levels than men (IBGE, 1974, p. 58). This has been a trend for women since the 1940 census for the age groups 5 to 9 years and 10 to 14 years, and since the 1950 census for the group 15 to 19 years old (Ferraro, 2009).

The near parity of literacy levels between the sexes in younger generations, as well as a subsequent trend towards higher rates among girls, is partially due to the expansion of schooling throughout the country, but other aspects were also relevant. Women with lower levels of instruction were socially positioned in worse conditions than men. According to Rosemberg, for women in those conditions “rural occupations imply seasonal, underpaid work performed under stern physical conditions; in the cities the only choice is domestic service which, in the case of maids, becomes a stigma rather than a profession, often limiting life-projects” (1992, p. 314).

Rosemberg also suggests that “unlike men’s experience — who have more freedom of locomotion and of wandering through different spaces — school is, for Brazilian women, the privileged space for learning, working and sharing social

contact” (1992, p. 315). Thus, while men benefited from a large range of extracurricular opportunities to help them succeed in their professional lives, for women schools were one of the most important opportunities for social and economic advancement. Furthermore, as Ferraro (2009) argues, the improvement of literacy rates among women might not be a sign of equality but rather an indication that women needed more qualifications than men to occupy the same professional position.

The higher literacy levels among girls than boys in later decades could also be related to an intersection between gender and race. When considering the US context, hooks (2004) argues that a curious and critical attitude is perceived, by peers and teachers, as a problem in black boys throughout their time in school, while it is seen as a desirable attribute in white boys. Additionally, an anti-intellectual culture is broadly reinforced among black men, where physical force is valued and intellectual capacity remains suspect (hooks, 2004). A similar environment of low academic achievement among black and brown boys seems to exist in Brazil. Marteleto and Dondero (2016), working with the National Home Sampling Survey and considering same-sex non-identical twins, show that “the coefficient for being labeled as nonwhite is negative,” where children labeled as non-white experience more academic difficulties than their twins labeled as white (Marteleto & Dondero, 2016, p. 1200). The differences between white and non-white twin girls are minor, but the differences between white and non-white twin boys represent nearly a year of schooling. For them “nonwhite boys are the most educationally disadvantaged group” (Marteleto & Dondero, 2016, p. 1201).

From a qualitative perspective, M. Carvalho (2005) collected data from one elementary school in São Paulo about the self-declaration of 1st- to 4th-grade students as to their skin colour, as well as declarations from the teachers about the skin colour of their students. She also asked teachers to evaluate students regarding their school performance and discipline. The results show a mismatch between student and teacher declarations, with a tendency among teachers, most of whom were white, to consider the skin colour of their students, especially girls, to be whiter than the students declared themselves to be. Additionally, boys were more associated with undisciplined behaviour, and black boys were considered to have more learning problems than white boys (M. Carvalho, 2005). It could be the case, then, that the higher literacy levels among girls in comparison with boys shown in the later censuses were, at least partially, caused by the low achievement of black boys in school.

When students leave school without knowing how to read and write, Freire argues, they “do not represent a failure of the schooling class; their expulsion reveals the triumph of the schooling class” (Freire, in Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 121). The various covert practices imposed by the dominant ideologies force them to leave. I would add that, in a literate society like that of Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s, the large number of people who do not read or write because they never had access to school also represents a triumph of the ruling class. Non-literates become more easily perceived as mere objects, being victims of external severe economic exploitation and their own fatalistic view of a bleak future. Their existence also fosters “false generosity” among the ruling classes (Freire, 1970/2005), where those

in power can exercise charity to soothe any feelings of guilt without actually aiming to change the structural distribution of power within society.

5.2 Children, poverty and the psychological approaches to literacy learning

The history of the theories that have provided the basis for teaching of reading and writing in Brazil can be perceived as a series of confrontations between “old” and “modern” traditions (Mortatti, 2000). Once a new theory becomes established it is not too long before it is regarded as outdated and in need of replacement. In the last years of the 19th century, for example, what Mortatti (2000), calls a “quarrel of the methods” involved the synthetic method, one promoting the teaching of reading and writing from the part to the whole (syllables to words, words to sentences), being criticised by the advocates of the analytical method, which favoured starting with larger units of language (words, sentences, and even small stories) before moving to the smaller units (syllables and letters) (Mortatti, 2000).

By the 1920s, however, the dispute about literacy methodologies began to lose strength altogether as psychological approaches gained popularity (Mortatti, 2000). At this time, education in Brazil was becoming heavily influenced by the discursive and non-discursive practices of the New Education movement (M. M. Carvalho, 2004). Following the end of the First World War, there was an expectation that education based on a scientific perspective was necessary for a modern society. The primary focus of teaching should be the students, and their academic and moral development. There was also some fear about the possibility of an uprising of the “masses,” a perception that favoured a civic education to form “docile and productive” workers (M. M. Carvalho, 2004, p. 92).

The leading exponent of the New Education movement in literacy studies in Brazil was Manoel Bergström Lourenço Filho, with his work *Testes ABC* (*ABC's Tests*). He believed that the grouping of children by the categories of chronological age, 'mental age' or 'intelligence quotient' were insufficient when the goals were a "learning economy" and a "good school organisation" (Lourenço Filho, 1934/2008, p. 47). Instead, he preferred grouping students into "homogeneous classrooms" according to their degree of "maturity," which in his view involved visual-motor and auditory-motor coordination; visual and auditory memory; use of vocabulary; and resistance to fatigue, echolalia, and inversion of figures in the copy process. With this approach, Lourenço Filho sought to replace the concept of the "average student" with one more sensitive to the individualities of the learners (Lourenço Filho, 1934/2008).

This notion of using "objective tests" to measure and act upon reality was broadly accepted by many other educators of the time, and Lourenço Filho's approach brought a new scientific character to the field of literacy (Mortatti, 2000). He became very influential in Brazil with the publication of the *ABC's Tests* from 1934 to 1974, which reached a total circulation of 62,000 copies. A large number of teachers from public and private schools used Lourenço Filho's tests, or informal and adapted versions, to organise their classes (Mortatti, 2000). His concept of child "maturity," however, not only included a "diagnosis" of any given student's abilities but also established a "prognosis" that would improve his or her academic performance (Lourenço Filho, 1934/2008, p. 81). After evaluating the student's "capacities" and "disabilities," "corrective exercises" were prescribed for each of the aspects assessed by the tests (Lourenço Filho, 1934/2008, p. 81; 132).

Lourenço Filho insisted on placing children at the centre of the learning process and promoted as the “golden rule” for classroom success the “caring attention and understanding” of teachers (1934/2008, p. 128). The necessary conditions for learning reading and writing, in his view, were the “maturity” of the children, their willingness to learn, the selection of lesson content, and the teacher’s abilities (Lourenço Filho, 1934/2008, p. 129-130). There was, however, little to no concern about how social conditions could influence learning beyond the idea that children from the working class required remedial training in such things as aural and visual skills, the use of pen and paper, and vocabulary. That the situation was more complex than this — that poverty-driven malnutrition, for example, hindered learning — was attested to by the fact that 72.5% of students placed in a class of “immatures” (according to the *ABC’s Tests* classification) in 1934 were found to be malnourished when examined by a doctor (Lourenço Filho, 1934/2008, p. 127).

The psychological perspective continued to have significant importance in discussions about literacy over the next decades. For example, from the five postgraduate theses published about literacy in Brazil in the 1960s, four employed a theoretical approach from psychology. Similarly, from the 37 theses published in the 1970s, 20 used such an approach (M. B. Soares & Maciel, 2000, p. 35). During this time, the notion of “readiness” as a set of prerequisites that children should possess to learn how to read and write gained strength, especially through the work of Ana Maria Poppovic, an educational psychologist whose ideas shared many affinities with those of Lourenço Filho. Poppovic believed that the large number of school failures in the 1st grade of elementary education were caused both by the lack of incentives for children from “economically and culturally disadvantaged

environments” and by the inappropriate training and support of teachers (Poppovic, 1977, p. 41). She acknowledged that there was a hidden curriculum⁸ in schools but did not regard its presence as grounds for criticism of the cultural values implicit in it, as the original theory had. Instead, she took the implicit values as useful aspirational targets for children from the working class. Therefore, the hidden curriculum, in her view, worked to reinforce the argument in favour of ameliorating “the needs and the weakness of the most underprivileged children” (Poppovic, 1977, p. 43).

This perspective of fixing the “cultural marginalisation” of students, to use Poppovic’s terms, unfolded in two main practices. The first of these was connected with the expansion of early childhood education. In Brazil, the spread of industrialisation and urbanisation, with the consequent increase of women working outside of their homes, had had a significant impact on the demands for childhood education, as it had done worldwide. In the 1940s, for example, a broad package of labour legislation included a requirement for companies with more than 30 female employees to provide specific places for childcare during the period of breastfeeding (Andrade, 2010). It is important to note that black women, who had been part of the workforce since colonisation — as slaves or otherwise — while caring for their infant children entirely on their own, only at this time began to receive some form of state childcare support.

Regarding literacy learning specifically, the “benefits” of attending an early childhood centre had already been pointed out by various commentators. Lourenço

⁸ Since the 1960s, an extensive academic literature has developed on the notion of *hidden curriculum*, a concept that analyses schools’ rules and programmes to highlight that which is not formal or overt (Haddad, 2014). Apple (2004, p. 13) explains hidden curriculum as “the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years.”

Filho (1934/2008, p. 131), writing in the 1930s, had supported the idea that children who attended kindergarten “would more easily adapt to the initial learning of reading and writing” — and, implicitly, to schooling in general. By the 1970s, this view had expanded, and childhood education had come to be seen variously as a way of “speeding up” the “rhythm” of literacy learning (Alfabetização no ensino pré-escolar será acelerada, 1978, p. 11), of implementing “a global preparation” for schooling while compensating for the alleged deficits of the “large mass of marginalised children” (Municípios podem investir na pré-escola, 1975, p. 26), or of forming “homogeneous classrooms” in elementary education by minimising the “individual differences” of students at the pre-school level (Cândito Mota inaugura 7 classes de pré-primário em bairro rural, 1978, p. 22). Enrolling young children in the educational system was also perceived as a means of reducing the influence of parents (read *working-class* parents). Henrique Gamba, Municipal Secretary of Social Welfare of São Paulo, for example, argued that although the city was “spending an extraordinary amount of money on day-care centres,” these provided a way to help children avoid “the path of marginalisation,” as they would, in his opinion, give the children a better chance of achieving an academic qualification. He then went on to suggest that children were “only the effect, we must also fight the cause, which are the parents, or the family” (Criança, o problema que a cidade esqueceu, 1975, p. 10).

To fully understand Gamba’s meaning, the Brazilian usage of *marginalisation* (*marginalização* in Portuguese) must be considered. Following its Latin root, *marginalização* refers most literally to the “act or effect of marginalising” or of being placed “on the margins of a society or a group” (Priberam Dicionário Online, s.d.). In

popular use, however, it often refers to the “act of making someone a marginal, a thug, a criminal” (Dicio - Dicionário Online de Português, s.d.). *Marginal*, in other words, has strong derogatory connotations in that it can be used not only as an adjective but also as a personal noun to denote someone who operates outside the law. Gamba’s use of *marginalisation*, therefore, means not only that children from working class backgrounds and their families exist on the margins of society but also that they are potential criminals.

Even in its non-derogatory use, however, *marginalisation* remains a controversial term. Freire, for example, criticises its use when applied to contexts of social oppression. He argues that the “semantic nature” of the word denotes groups of people existing on the margins of society, whereas in his view people are always situated inside power structures (Freire, as cited by Darder, 2015, pp. 134-135). For him, the oppressed “have always been ‘inside’ — inside the structure which made them ‘beings for others.’ The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 74). Furthermore, he suggests that the term *marginalisation* works as “an ideological invention” to conceal inequality by producing the false impression that those persons labelled as “marginalised” choose to remain in positions of vulnerability, while in fact they are being “denied their rights to be, to exist fully” (Freire, as cited by Darder, 2015, pp. 134-135). Thus, the term *marginalisation*, either by itself or qualified as cultural, political and/or economic marginalisation, can be employed as a linguistic trick to de-emphasise oppressive situations and shift the focus from broad social structures to individuals.

Despite the promotion of childhood education as the best means of ensuring success, or at least better rates of success, in literacy learning during the first year of elementary education, few resources were invested in it. Finding a vacancy, for example, in a public childhood education institution was simply a “question of luck:” of the 15 million children between two and six years old in 1975, only 450 thousand were enrolled (*A sorte de encontrar vaga para os filhos*, 1975, p. 30). The justification given for the low levels of investments can be, in a certain way, traced back to the influence of multilateral organisations. During the 1970s, there was an increasing participation of UNESCO and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in childhood education in Brazil, but this was mainly through the circulation of ideas through seminars, publications, and special work missions, not through funding contributions (Rosemberg, 2002). Moreover, these organisations were interested in childhood education primarily as a way to reduce malnourishment. Considering that in Brazil, as in many developing countries, elementary education had not yet reached all the children in the expected group age, the expansion of childhood education, in the organisations’ view, had to be done with minimal resources in informal spaces (Rosemberg, 2002).

This approach went well with the dictatorship’s eagerness to keep expenditures low in social services in order to raise economic surpluses. The results, as Rosemberg (2002) demonstrates, were the proliferation of improvised classrooms, with teachers without any formal qualification, in a context of a shortage of school materials. One of the tactics to reduce expenditures was to build simple sheds as pre-schools, using a voluntary workforce from the neighbourhood (Branco, 1979, p. 23). Paulo Machado, Municipal Secretary of Services and Works

of São Paulo, for example, asserted that the daycares constructed within this model were “much simpler, [and] more adapted to reality” because the old ones “inhibited favelas residents” as “no mother dared to approach the building.” Similarly, Maria do Carmo Brandt de Carvalho, Regional Supervisor of Butantã, stated that “luxurious [pre-schools] are an assault on low-income populations, in addition to a waste of public money” (Branco, 1979, p. 23). This perception reinforced the idea that the residents of lower income neighbourhoods neither needed nor wanted quality buildings for the education of their children.

Another tactic to reduce costs was to employ children’s mothers as unpaid workers in the daycare centres. Rio de Janeiro State, for example, established a programme where mothers worked one day a week in the centre that their child was attending, with their only payment being “the lunch, which they eat together with their children” (Mães na escola, 1977, p. 35). This was proclaimed to be an efficient method because “for some of them [mothers], as for many children, school meals are practically the only meal of the day”. The mothers received a couple hours of training before joining the programme, which was seen as sufficient because “children in preschool are dedicated to small tasks” and “the level of schooling of the auxiliary staff does not matter.” According to Dulexia Menezes Nunes, Pre-School Coordinator of the Secretary of Education, however, although mothers joined the centres’ activities, they “do not know what they are doing” (Mães na escola, 1977, p. 35). There was no criticism regarding the fact that the school lunch was the only meal for many mothers and children. The lack of specialised personnel in childhood education was also seen as acceptable. The overall tone of the article was one of disdain for the work done by the mothers, who were perceived as

unknowledgeable and also assumed to be attending the centres only for the offered meal without many concerns for the development of their children.

The perspective of “cultural marginalisation” of students also strengthened the case for developing either a compensatory period before the school term or a preparatory period during the first weeks of elementary education to facilitate literacy learning during the child’s 1st year. This was done under the assumption that children from “culturally marginalised” backgrounds, understood to be those from families with household incomes less than six times the minimum wage, were two years behind in their cognitive development at six years of age in comparison with children from middle economic levels. It was further assumed that this difference would only grow over time (Trinta e quatro municípios poderão ter unidades pré-primário este ano, 1976, p. 23). Thus, the reasons for school failure were seen as the “poor environment in which children live” (Projeto-Prontidão a partir de 2a feira, 1975, p. 10) and the consequent “lack of readiness” to learn how to read and write because of such “poor” surroundings (Municípios podem investir na pré-escola, 1975, p. 26).

During the compensatory and the preparatory periods, motor exercises were employed to develop and measure children’s coordination, laterality, and spatial perception, among other things, with the expected result being that the children would then be ready to learn how to read and write. “Readiness” to read and write was defined by Poppovic (1971) to comprise three main aspects: intellectual, social-affective, and psycho-neurological. These aspects, following a theoretical framework from psychology, involved the evaluation of various genetic and

environmental characteristics of students, such as their “mental age” and their “adaptability” to the school’s context (Poppovic, 1971).

Regarding literacy learning, Luke and Gilbert have argued that “if literacies entail historic and culture-specific ways of using writing and other technologies of inscription, then competing educational discourses and truth claims about them can be assessed in terms of which practices they valorise and denounce” (1993, p. 2). With this in mind, one could ask which practices were valued and which were denounced by Lourenço Filho’s and Poppovic’s psychological approaches to literacy learning. Arguably, Lourenço Filho and Poppovic cared deeply about children and hoped their research would lead to better learning conditions and even better living conditions once the students mastered reading and writing. However, as Lankshear (1993, p. 103) explains, “good intentions” are not always enough, because when “social research proceeds from a mystified view of (social) reality, it may have all kinds of consequences that are unintended, unwanted, and that remain unrecognized by the researchers themselves.” Thus, the psychological approaches to literacy worked, even if only unintentionally, to dehumanise children.

Lourenço Filho and Poppovic held a static conception about knowledge. For them, knowledge about reading and writing was seen as an object, just waiting to be transferred from teachers to students as soon as children developed a “mature” or a “ready” physical and mental state. In views like this, as Mayo (2004, p. 50) points out, educators (and researchers) “own” the knowledge, walking in the classrooms with the “object [to be learned] in hand.” Students, positioned as passive beings, experienced their everyday life in school as endless repetitions of

motor exercises, with rare opportunities for authentic and curious inquiry about the written language.

Lourenço Filho's and Poppovic's proposals, seen as the results of neutral research in the field of educational psychology, were perceived as objective instruments to improve literacy learning. Although it is impossible to argue if either scholar was "ingenuous or strategically neutral" in his or her position (Freire, 2001, p. 73), the knowledge they produced and the teaching practices they inspired could not be "in favor of everyone and everything" (p. 92). An important aspect of this discussion is the notion of "readiness," which, disguised in a mist of "scientific neutrality," considers the knowledge and the experience of the ruling classes as the standard to be followed (E. C. Silva, 1988). Shor (1993, p. 30-31), drawing from Freire, criticizes views based exclusively on ruling-class standards on the grounds that they only value an "alien" language and way of being and, therefore, deny an anthropological view of culture to the majority of students.

The psychological approaches saw the language and the culture of children and parents from working class backgrounds as things to be replaced for better and more improved versions. Additionally, little to no connection was made between the knowledge that children already had from their experience outside school and the knowledge that they were expected to learn in their classrooms. When students did not display what was considered to be an adequate performance, they were seen as lacking the necessary prerequisites for literacy learning. Many teachers took to classifying and ranking students, even going so far as to predict their future learning possibilities and determine their academic future (E. C. Silva, 1988). "Undesirable," "abnormal" and "special" students, such as those

who presented undisciplined or disinterested behaviour, or those who had no clear notion of space, who were unable to retain visual and auditory information, or who lacked the vocabulary demanded by the tests, were excluded and blamed for their own exclusion (E. C. Silva, 1988).

Education administrators and teachers, following the psychological approaches, classified and labelled students as soon as they entered their first year of mandatory schooling (*Curso especial para atrasados*, 1972, p. 23). The labelling justified employing “special classrooms” if students presented “different level[s] of achievement” (*Trinta e quatro municípios poderão ter unidades pré-primário este ano*, 1976, p. 23). The problem with this practice rested not in the desire to elaborate different curriculum guidelines to better suit students’ needs and contexts, but in the fact that lower levels of achievement were intrinsically associated with “marginalised children.” In this way, the “special classrooms” reduced even further the learning possibilities of those children inside school and reinforced a sense of hopelessness about their capacities to understand the world around them.

Finally, Lourenço Filho’s and Poppovic’s educational programmes effectively minimized the responsibility on the part of researchers, school principals and teachers for children’s learning. If students were unable to read and write, it was because they lacked the appropriate physical and mental conditions – they were just not “mature” or “ready” enough. If they learned only basic reading and writing abilities, such that there was little difference in their lives, it was because they were unable to surpass their “cultural marginalisation.” As Roberts explains, “if literacy is just a skill, or a tool, or facility with a neutral technology, consideration of social,

political, and ethical questions will always be a separate issue” (1998, p. 58). Therefore, understanding and teaching literacy as a “neutral technology,” as in the psychological approaches, takes attention away from the social, political and ethical effects of the decisions made by those involved in teaching reading and writing.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that throughout the 20th century a large percentage of the population remained without reading and writing abilities in Brazil, and that even in the 1970s younger age groups still did not have universal access to schooling. Illiteracy rates, however, were not evenly distributed across the population, with substantial differences by region, zone, gender, race, and wealth. Inhabitants in the northeast and rural areas, people with black and brown skin colour, and those with lower incomes were historically and systematically denied access to schooling and literacy learning. These oppressive conditions limited the rights of non-literates to become fully human and silenced their voices further when they were, for example, blamed for the lack of economic development of the country, prevented from voting, or ridiculed for using a fingerprint mark instead of a written signature on official documents.

This chapter has further shown that even when students had access to schooling, it seemed to work, in Mayo’s interpretation of Freire, as a means of “internalizing the image of their oppressor” (Mayo, 2004, p. 39) and silencing students’ own culture. As Macedo explains, the task facing literacy teachers is that of dealing with the “tension” between appropriating “codes and cultures of the dominant spheres” and valuing students’ “histories, experiences, and the culture of their immediate environments” (Macedo, in Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 47). It is not a

matter, then, of completely ignoring the dominant curriculum or the dominant rules of grammar and syntax in schools, but of including students' experience in meaningful ways. The psychological approaches employed at that time negated the possibility that students from the working class could bring valuable prior knowledge to the schools. In these conditions, there was little opportunity for authentic interaction among children, parents, teachers and researchers.

Finally, in aiming, first, to adapt students to school life and develop their motor skills and emotional capacity, and only then to start teaching them how to read and write, Lourenço Filho, Poppovic and others, held a reductionist misunderstanding of the gnosiological cycle of knowledge. As Freire explains, learning is not about “domesticating” students or “extending” knowledge to them, but about creating and recreating knowledge in collective sense through dialogue (Freire, 1974/2013). To establish a dialogue, however, respect and openness are necessary. The interviews with educators and the media articles discussed in this chapter show a disregard for and even ridicule of the working class, with their harsh living conditions used as excuses to indirectly exclude children from schools. Under a veil of scientific neutrality, students' alleged deficits were taken to be the result of poverty and were pointed to as the reason for any learning difficulties. In this way, flaws in the educational system were ignored and the government's responsibility to provide elementary schooling for all children diminished.

Chapter 6

The Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL)

This chapter discusses the *Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização* - MOBRAL (Brazilian Literacy Movement), which constituted the dictatorship's preferred option for teaching teenagers and adults to read and write. First, I examine the establishment of MOBRAL as a mass movement and the guidelines of its literacy programme. Second, I explore the self-promotion strategies employed by MOBRAL and compare the view put forward in pro-MOBRAL advertising and publicity with the material conditions in the classrooms. Third, I analyse both the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry established to evaluate MOBRAL's involvement in teaching literacy to children, and the controversy involving the literacy rates estimated by MOBRAL versus those determined by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

6.1 MOBRAL and the “pedagogy of the free man”

After the coup in 1964, popular movements in education and culture, such as the *Movimento de Cultura Popular* – MCP (Popular Culture Movement), the *Campanha de Pé no Chão também se aprende a Ler* (Barefoot Also Learn to Read Campaign) and the *Centros Populares de Cultura* – CPCs (Popular Culture Centres), were repressed, and those persons involved in these initiatives, like Paulo Freire, Miguel Arraes, and Djalma Maranhão, among many others, were persecuted. The exception was the Catholic Church's *Movimento de Educação de Base* – MEB

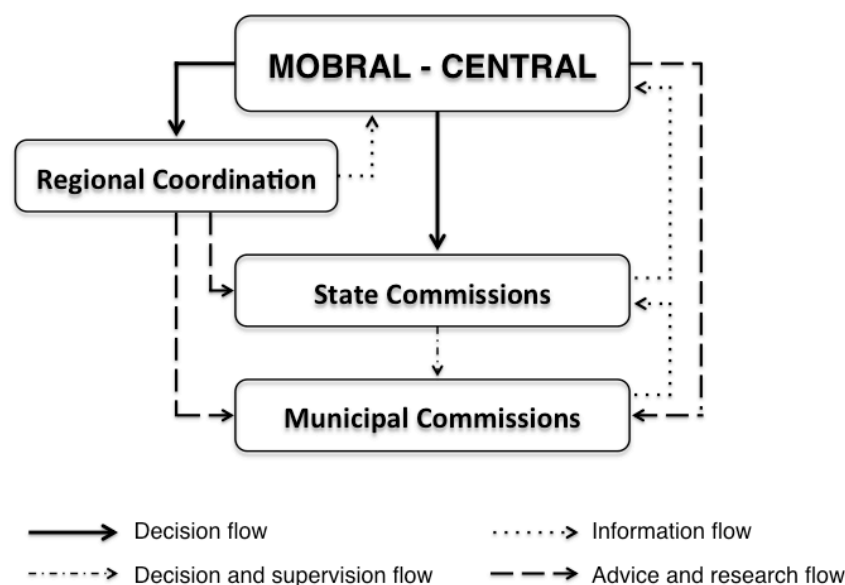
(Base Education Movement), which, stripped of its most revolutionary aspects, continued to function with reduced personnel and funding.

To improve literacy levels, the military government ventured on two fronts. One focused on young children, where the main objectives were the creation of more schools to increase attendance levels and the implementation of student welfare programmes, such as the free distribution of textbooks and school meals, both of which could improve students' chances of achieving a minimum level of formal education. The other front focused on teaching teenage and adult students to learn how to read and write by offering short courses featuring a simplified approach to literacy. This second front was the responsibility of MOBRAL, which was presented as "a vast and perhaps ultimate attempt to raise the standard of living of marginalised populations," one that aimed at a "part of the Brazilian adult population that only gave its sweat to the country" but "received little or almost nothing" in return from it (Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização [MOBRAL], 1975, p. 29).

MOBRAL was created in 1967 as a federal foundation (hereafter also referred as the Foundation) with administrative and financial autonomy. Its head office was located in Rio de Janeiro, with the expectation that would later transfer to Brasília once adequate facilities had been constructed. The Foundation focused on the development of programmes targeting "functional literacy" and "continuing education of adolescents and adults" (Brasil, 1967). However, it was only after three years had passed, in 1970, that MOBRAL started its actions, having finally secured a systematic form of revenue with donations from private companies through the deduction of one or two percent of their income tax (Brasil, 1970). This happened

under the presidency of Mário Henrique Simonsen and with the support of the Minister of Education and Culture, Jarbas Passarino. After 1971, a percentage of the revenues from the Federal Lottery was also invested in the Foundation, increasing its earnings. With these new resources, MOBRAL soon became the government body with the largest number of agencies across the country, with more branches than the post office (MOBRAL, 1975).

Figure 8: MOBRAL's organisational chart



Source: MOBRAL (1973, p. 18). Edited by the author

MOBRAL's rapid expansion was possibly due to the Foundation's decentralised structure in central, state and municipal commissions. The central agency in Rio de Janeiro was responsible for establishing the student learning programmes and the teacher training courses, purchasing the textbooks, and managing the funding. The state commissions, on the other hand, disseminated the central guidelines for the municipalities and collaborated in signature of the

agreements. Finally, the municipal commissions mobilised the local communities, hired teachers, enrolled students and provided the course completion certificates (MOBRAL, 1975; B. N. Souza, 2016). Although MOBRAL presented a decentralised structure regarding its actions, the key decisions were taken at a central level, as shown in Figure 8.

The projects coordinated by MOBRAL were proudly touted by members of the government as an impressive example of large-scale governmental initiatives with minimum costs (CN/DSF, 24/05/1973, p. 1427). Mário Henrique Simonsen, an economist and the President of MOBRAL from 1970 to 1974, stated that “the operational framework of MOBRAL in literacy courses is extremely simple and standardised, as would be recommended in any mass operation” (CN/DSF, 24/05/1973, p. 1427). Even the opposition in Congress seemed to agree that literacy learning was also better addressed in this way. Senator Benjamin Farah (MDB, Rio de Janeiro), for example, said that “the resounding success of MOBRAL” could not “be separated from the figure of its President (...) who immediately realised the need to face the problem of mass literacy, not only in the pedagogical sense but, above all, from an economic and administrative perspective” (CN/DSF, 04/08/1973, pp. 2686-2687). The prioritisation of an economic view over a pedagogical one was justified through the argument of the economy of scale. The idea was to maximise efficiency by maintaining an extensive production line, in this case of literacy learning students, in order to keep low costs per product (i.e., learner). This line of action was in accordance with the ideology of technocracy propagated by the government.

MOBRAL's ties to an administrative perspective that prioritised profits, however, went beyond the notion of economies of scale in that it viewed literacy learning as being associated with economic growth and the development of a more qualified workforce. The federal government seemed committed to training up the "sub-utilised" human resources of the nation, i.e., "the illiterate and semi-literate" (Rondon e Mobral: o sucesso, 1972, p. 20). Luiz Thomas, State Coordinator of MOBRAL in São Paulo, for example, said that "by generating [a better qualified] workforce, we will also be generating economic and social development." He further mentioned that literacy learning, "as long as [it is] well orientated, tends to lead the student to better vocational training, which in the medium and long term will make him or her a better consumer and a more active participant in the social community" (O MOBRAL está libertando brasileiros, 1971, p. 34). Similarly, President Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974) stated that "among MOBRAL's objectives, besides literacy (teaching to read and write), there is also an implicit need to give all Brazilians the opportunity to participate in the effort to develop the country and to benefit from this development" (Médici paraninfa hoje 4 mil alunos do MOBRAL em Jundiaí, 1971, p. 5). Underlying the comments of Thomas and Médici is the assumption that non-literate people were not contributing as much to the society or the economy of the country as they should, but that with "well orientated" reading and writing abilities they could become better workers and consumers.

Despite this argument about economic and even social development, MOBRAL's actions can be seen as an opportunistic manoeuvre to achieve political gain. By the 1970s, there was a consensus in education that large-scale literacy

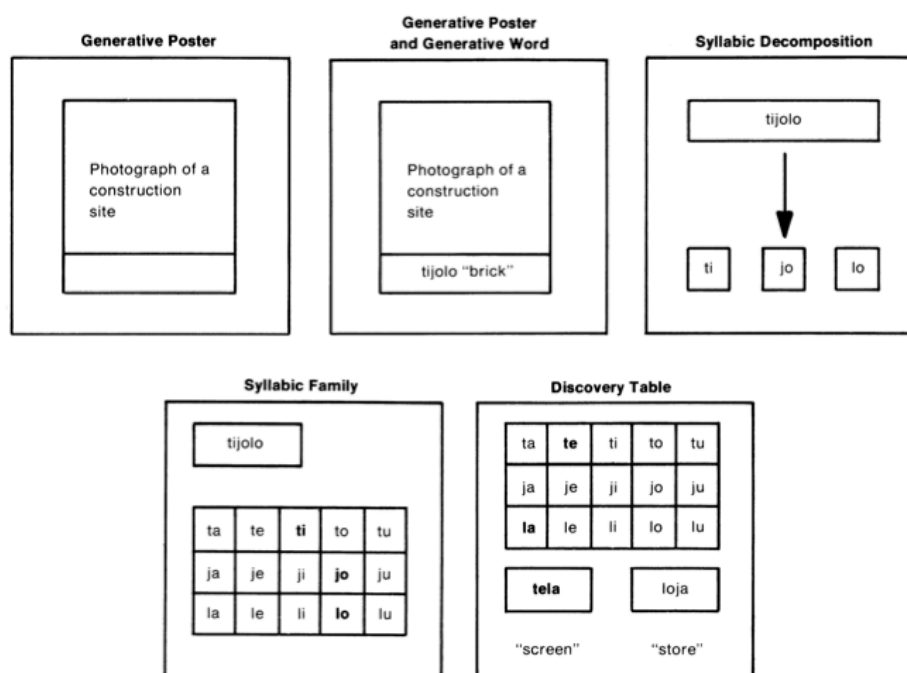
campaigns per se are not sufficient to produce the desired educational results (Paiva, 1981). In a surprising and contradictory way, even MOBREAL's president seemed to doubt the effectiveness of the proposal. In response to Senator João Calmon (ARENA, Espírito Santo), Mário Henrique Simonsen wrote that MOBREAL's programmes were only precarious exercises in "pot-hole filling" for literacy learning, as the government was still unable to provide children with universal access to primary schooling (CN/DSF, 09/09/1975, p. 4380). On another occasion, he told journalists that "if [MOBREAL] does not accomplish anything [else], it will [at least] be votes for the Arena [party]" (Paiva, 1981, p. 114). Nevertheless, many in the military regime followed Simonsen in opting to ignore the consensus of educators and invest vast amounts of resources in MOBREAL's mass approach. This was done under the assumption that MOBREAL would help to both amplify the government's legitimacy among the popular classes and neutralise opposition forces (Paiva, 1981).

Many initiatives were implemented during MOBREAL's existence, including the Programme of Integrated Education, MOBREAL Cultural, the Programme of Community Education for Health, the Programme of Diversified Community Action, and the Programme of Self-Taught Education (L. R. Santos, 2014). The main project for literacy learning, however, was the Programme of Functional Literacy, which focused primarily, but not exclusively, on the young urban population between 14 and 35 years of age (MOBREAL, 1973). Each course ran for five months, with two hours per day from Monday to Friday. The academic goals involved developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, vocabulary, reasoning ability, and creativity. However, the programme also included non-academic objectives such as the

formation of “positive habits and attitudes in relation to work” and the improvement of “personal, family and community hygiene conditions,” among others (Corrêa, 1979, p. 152).

In MOBRAL, literacy learning was based on standard generative words that were the same for all the regions of the country (Corrêa, 1976, 1979; MOBRAL, 1975). Although popular movements before the coup had also used generative words in literacy learning, these efforts were either ignored or disqualified by MOBRAL and its supporters (Corrêa, 1979; MOBRAL, 1975; *As primeiras luzes. Um ano de Mobral contra a escuridão do analfabetismo*, 1971, p. 40-44; *O MOBRAL está libertando brasileiros*, 1971, p. 34). In MOBRAL’s new initiative, the generative words selected focused on what the Foundation called “basic needs” (education, health, nutrition, housing, clothing, employment, leisure, social, security and human freedoms), and included terms like *escola* (school), *comida* (food), *trabalho* (work) and *família* (family). The courses were organised into different modules, each with five steps. The process started with the presentation of a poster showing an image of the object denoted by one of the generative words. After a discussion of the picture, the corresponding word was introduced to the class and added to the poster. Then, the word was divided into syllables, and the syllables connected with their respective syllabic families. Finally, the students were presented with a “discovery table” showing the syllabic families and instructed to form new words. The students also had access to a reader, a language exercise book, an arithmetic exercise book, and two journals (Corrêa, 1976, 1979; MOBRAL, 1975).

Figure 9: MOBRAL's methodology - generative word *tijolo* (brick)



Source: Corrêa (1976, p. 535; 536). Edited by the author

Arlindo Lopes Corrêa, MOBRAL's president from 1974 to 1981, characterised the Foundation's methodology as one that expected the "active involvement" of students, where "the content and direction of discussion are not predetermined by the instructor but develop through participation by the pupils" (Corrêa, 1976, pp. 524; 535-536). However, not all teachers would agree with these statements, at least not in retrospect. Teacher Maria Gorete, for example, has explained that "the classes were very structured. They had a beginning, a middle, and an end. Every day you had to follow that routine. (...) On the first day there was just the [letter] A, the next day the E, then there was AE" (A. R. Santos, 2015, p. 58). Similarly, teacher Maria Clara said that they "had to follow the steps. A family of letters, then another." The classes were supposed to start with a conversation to "raise awareness, but it was just for [the students to] be able to form sentences without paper" (L. K. Gomes, 2012, p. 80). Adding a different perspective, teacher

Maria Eunice complained that the generative words were “loose words that had nothing to do with their everyday life, words like a hoe in an urban environment” (L. K. Gomes, 2012, p. 80).

M. G. Barbosa (2014, p. 84) argues that Freire’s success in fostering literacy learning with “words pregnant with the world” in the 1960s was transformed in MOBRAL’s classes into an uninspired learning programme filled with “words hollow of life.” While learning in Freire’s culture circles had been the result of dialogues both between teachers and students and between text and context, in MOBRAL’s courses teaching was disconnected from the students’ reality, and people were only seen as the “masses” rather as individuals with agency (M. G. Barbosa, 2014, p. 79). Additionally, from a Freirean perspective, a mechanistic reading and writing learning programme based on repetition is seen as “a lifeless exercise in drill and memorisation” if not “a manipulative exercise in domestication” where people’s capacity to connect word and world is severely undermined (Roberts, 1996b, p. 152).

In the 1970s, MOBRAL president Corrêa defended the Foundation’s work by explicitly condemning Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, proposing a “pedagogy of the free man” instead (Corrêa, 1979, p. 51). He asserted that MOBRAL provided a positive response to the difficult conditions face by the people, rather than the radical and subversive positions of the previous initiatives, which used literacy only as a “cultural broth” to advance their own Marxist and communist political views. He further stated that in MOBRAL “people discussed, with complete freedom, without any direction, the things of their world” (p. 50). Finally, he dismissed all criticism of the Foundation as ill-informed or evil-minded (p. 23-25).

One might ask what kind of freedom and “free man” Corrêa was referring to in his writing. With the censorship of the media and the widespread police brutality occurring at this time, Corrêa’s claims can only be perceived as a misrepresentation of reality. First, students were pressured to accept passively an external worldview. Lankshear has argued that in anti-dialogical literacy programmes, “prescriptions and directives are laid down — if not (always) in close detail then certainly in substance (...). The world itself is not negotiable. Neither are the ‘recipes’ for functioning. These are laid down to be followed” (Lankshear, 1993, p. 105). This was the case in MOBREAL, where students were seen mainly as objects of the prescriptions of the experts and not as subjects capable of engaging in meaningful dialogue.

Second, if, as proposed by Freire (2000, 2001), an authentic search for knowledge starts with a spirit of curious inquiry, MOBREAL’s students only had limited opportunities to learn. There was a profound culture of silence, reinforced by the police and military forces, where many of those opposed to the military regime were arrested, tortured and even murdered. Literacy learning, or at least critical literacy learning, involves “reading the word” together with the “world” in order to rewrite the latter (Freire & Macedo, 1987). It is difficult to imagine that students in the authoritarian environment in Brazil were encouraged to question their world, much less inspired to bring about any change.

Finally, even though MOBREAL presented a narrow view of “recovering” the non-literate population (MOBREAL, 1975), a portion of society still feared the potential consequences of the popularisation of reading and writing. For instance, even the ultra-conservative Colonel Jarbas Passarinho, a strong patron of

MOBRAL, had his actions as Minister of Education and Culture criticised for turning Brazil into a communist state, to which he replied that the government-directed expansion of literacy was an “*orderly*” one (CN/DSF, 04/12/1973, p. 5838). Thus, the popularisation of literacy, like the rest of the social policies developed by the military dictatorship, aimed at keeping the “masses” under control as much providing an expansion in educational opportunities.

6.2 MOBRAL advertising in contrast to actual classroom conditions

A significant government campaign sought to build consensus around the idea that MOBRAL would provide a satisfactory — and, especially, well ordered — solution for the high rates of illiteracy in the country and maybe even for the unequal distribution of wealth among the population. This effort included the establishment of (unrealistic) statistical goals for literacy education, the publication of advertising pieces in the media, the implementation of public competitions, and even the development of an exclusive line of postage stamps. Moreover, considering the lack of justification for MOBRAL among education professionals, the maintenance of the Foundation depended, on the one hand, on strict censorship by the regime to stifle criticism, and, on the other hand, on an intense and emotional publicity campaign to shape public opinion (Paiva, 1981).

The employees from MOBRAL forecast the end of illiteracy in Brazil by 1980, when the Foundation would complete ten years of operation (Mobral vitorioso, 1975, p. 47). Arlindo Lopes Corrêa, a little more modest, predicted that illiteracy would be at a residual rate of 5% by 1980 (O Mobral, épico e técnico, 1972, p. 37). Some states, according to Mário Henrique Simonsen, would eliminate illiteracy even

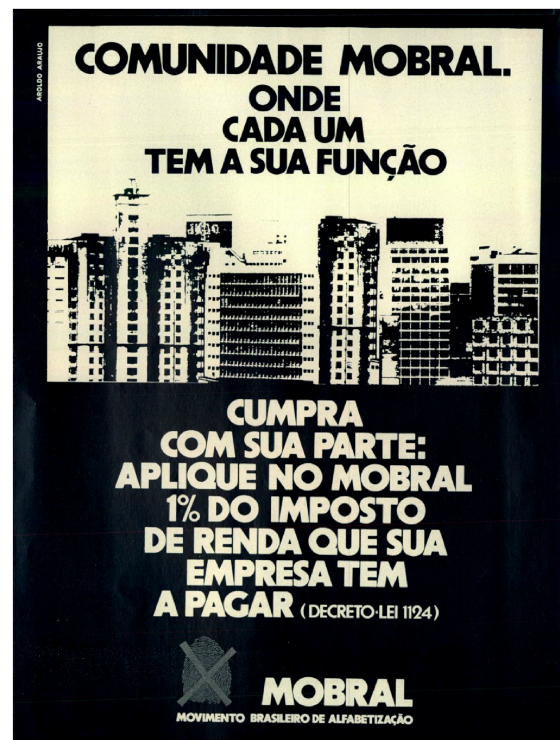
before 1980. São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais, for example, would “eradicate” illiteracy by 1977 (Nosso Estado não terá analfabetos a partir de 1977, 1973, p. 1). Considering that more than 30% of the Brazilian population over 15 years old declared to census interviewers that they did not know how to read and write in 1970 (IBGE, 1974, p. 39), such projections were overly optimistic. It is not possible to evaluate if these statistical prognoses were meant to be misleading. However, they undeniably worked to sustain a magical aura of success around MOBRAL.

The future success of the Foundation, nevertheless, was not portrayed as depending on the actions of the government but on a shared effort that would include the whole population. This idea was expressed, for example, in MOBRAL’s promotional lyrics “I am Brazilian, and I long for a place. I beg you to stop and listen to my song. You are also responsible, so teach me how to write. I have my willing hand, I feel the thirst for knowledge,” which was profusely sung in public events across the country (MOBRAL: em 1980, analfabetismo cai para 10 por cento, 1971, p. 10). The print media also shared the understanding that “literacy is an eminently community task” and “no one has the right to avoid doing [their] part of this task” because everyone’s participation was needed to “rid the country of a plague [illiteracy] that embarrasses it and retards its full development” (Folha de S. Paulo. Tarefa comunitaria, 1971, p. 6). Illiteracy, therefore, was raised as one of the causes, if not the most important cause, of the underdevelopment of the country; and a collective engagement was necessary.

To mobilise the population, MOBRAL had to gain visibility, and this was done through strategically placed pieces of advertising such as articles, images, and

song lyrics. Figure 10 is an example of marketing developed by the Foundation and targeting business owners. It appeared in *Veja* magazine as a whole page advertisement to increase MOBRAL's earnings.

Figure 10: MOBRAL's COMMUNITY

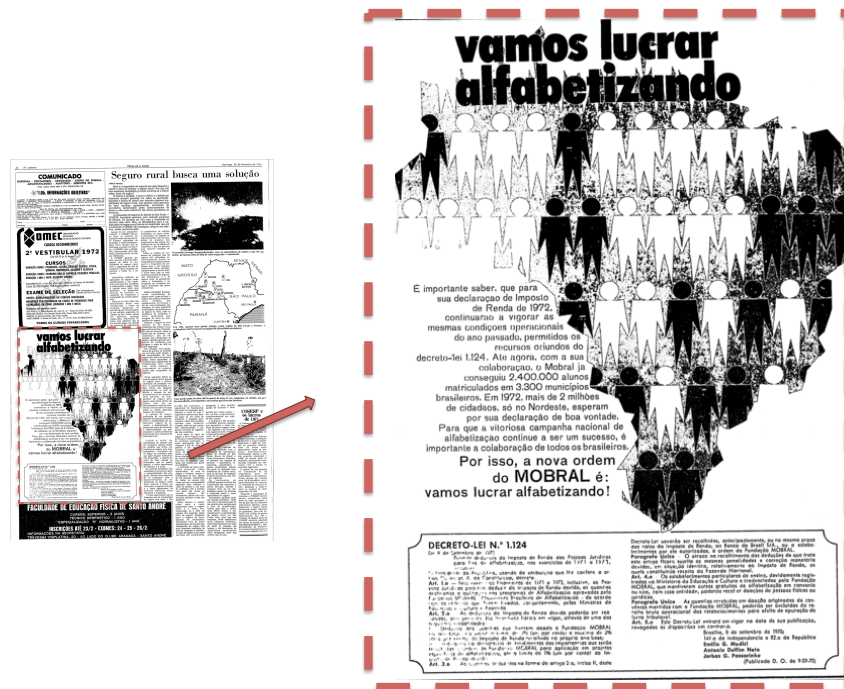


Source: Comunidade Mobral. Onde cada um tem a sua função (1973, p. 64)

The piece shows a photograph of high-rise buildings together with text declaring “The MOBRL Community. Where each [person] has their function” and “Do your part: give 1% of the income tax your company has to pay.” The image and text associate MOBRL with all city inhabitants, even those not connected directly with literacy learning, thereby, fostering the feeling of shared responsibility. At the bottom of the page, the acronym and full name of the Foundation are displayed alongside a crossed fingerprint symbolising the struggle against illiteracy and, in the Freirean sense, against non-literate people as well.

Figure 11 shows another example of MOBRAL marketing, this one published in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, where it occupied almost a quarter of one page.

Figure 11: Let's profit with literacy



Source: Vamos lucrar alfabetizando (1972, p. 32). Edited by the author

Like the *Veja* piece, it builds upon the notion of shared effort, stating that “for the victorious national literacy campaign to continue to be a success, it is important that all Brazilians collaborate.” It mentions the number of students so far enrolled in MOBRAL and includes the complete text of the decree-law permitting companies to donate part of their income tax to MOBRAL. This figure, however, also introduces two elements not included in Figure 10. First, it proclaims that “more than two million citizens, in the Northeast alone, are waiting for your declaration of goodwill,” which suggests the view of Northeast as a backward place in need of help from the urban, modern Southeast to enjoy the benefits of development. Second, it reaffirms, both in the title and in the text, the idea of profiting by literacy. It is not clear,

however, *who* would profit — whether the students, through the acquisition of limited reading and writing abilities, or the private companies, through an increase in numbers in the semi-skilled labour force, or the government, through the expansion of its popular support.

The next two figures are examples of the free publicity promoting MOBRAL:

Figure 12: MOBRAL: the first two million

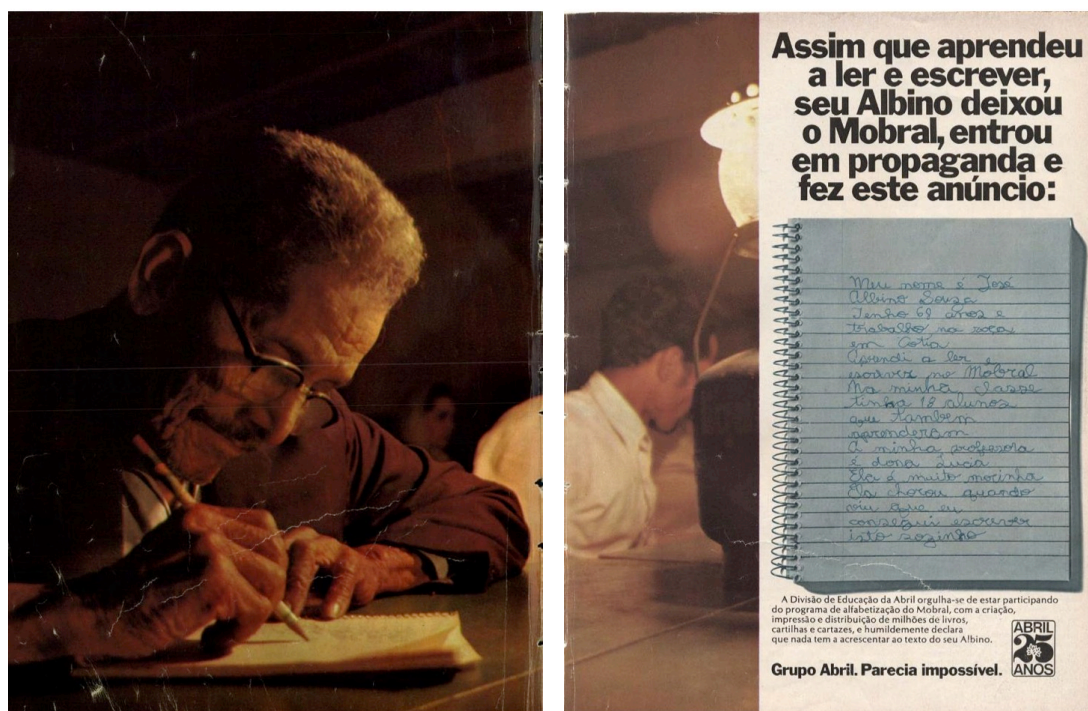


Source: *MOBRAL: os primeiros dois milhões* (1971, cover)

Figure 12 shows the cover of the 15 September 1971 issue of *Veja* magazine, which included an eight-page article describing and celebrating MOBRAL's first year. In the background of the image one sees a sheet of notebook paper with "MOBRAL: the first two million" in uncertain handwriting, emphasising the number of students – two million – who had already attended classes provided by the Foundation. In the foreground, the delicate and feminine hand of a teacher, with long, painted nails,

guides that of a student – a much older, rougher hand bearing marks of heavy work. The image evokes gender stereotypes, with the teacher being female and the student male, and race stereotypes, with the distinctly whiter hand of the teacher contrasted with the darker hand of the student, suggesting that she is of European descent and he of indigenous or African heritage. The figure also makes implicit associations between class, race and social status, with the illiterate brown or black worker and the knowledgeable white teacher as stereotypes of people in MOBRAL's classrooms.

Figure 13: As soon as [he] learned to read and write, Mr. Albino left MOBRAL, went into advertising and made this announcement



Source: Assim que aprendeu a ler e escrever, seu Albino deixou o Mobral, entrou em propaganda e fez este anúncio: (1975, pp. 45-46)

Figure 13, also from *Veja*, is a two-page advertisement of the Abril Group, the private company that still publishes *Veja* and that published much of MOBRAL's

print material. The photograph on the left shows an elderly man writing in his notebook during a MOBREAL class. Against a nearly dark background, his face and notebook are illuminated by the glow of the gas lamp in front of him, the metaphorical message being that literacy learning is a source of light in the otherwise dark lives of non-literate people. The text on the right states, "As soon as [he] learned to read and write, Mr. Albino left MOBREAL, went into advertising and made this announcement." This is followed by a photograph of Mr. Albino's notebook in which he has written that he is 68-year-old rural labour who "learned to read and write" together with 18 classmates in a MOBREAL literacy class. He ends by talking about his teacher: "My teacher is Madam Lucia. She is very young. She cried when she saw that I could write this myself."

This advertisement evokes, perhaps unintentionally, two myths involving literacy and education. The first derives from the emphasis given to the emotional gratification that teachers, and female teachers above all, get from their work. Freire (1998) criticised this attitude of overvaluing the personal satisfaction teachers gained from teaching as being a means of ignoring their demands for better work conditions. He says that such overvaluation "represents an 'innocent' ideological trap in that, under the illusion of softening teachers' lives, what is in fact being attempted is to soften the teachers' capacity to struggle" (p. 15). This view of teaching strengthens the unrealistic perception that good-hearted teachers work for love, and sometimes only for love, while totally ignoring their need for economic remuneration or even professional respect.

The second myth relates to the notion that literacy learning necessarily brings about a dramatic transformation in a non-literate person's life. Freire points out that

“merely teaching men to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs for men able to work, teaching more men to read will not create them” (1985, pp. 46-47). The statement that Mr. Albino “left MOBREAL” and “went into advertising” after becoming literate strikes one as being overly optimistic, as he most likely continued to be a rural worker after MOBREAL, with limited educational and income opportunities. Lankshear explains that functional literacy programmes usually work only to “redistribute places at the bottom,” not to question the nature of oppression (1993, p. 207). Without concern for the “root causes of poverty, distress, and despair,” there can only be a “mild amelioration of symptoms” (Lankshear, 1993, p. 207).

In addition to the emotionally charged tone of MOBREAL’s advertising and publicity pieces, other materials describing the Foundation, like press articles and self-published books, sometimes also displayed an overly self-centred perception. MOBREAL President Arlindo Lopes Corrêa, for example, compared the creation and continuous development of the “living organism” of MOBREAL to the genesis of the Solar System and the evolution of life on earth (Corrêa, 1979, p. 17). In his view, the success of MOBREAL was a “challenge to the skepticism of the pessimists” for which there was no “complete scientific explanation.” “Genius,” he claimed, “does not explain itself: It is perceived by what it creates, by what it transmits and by the results of its performance” (p. 29). Regardless of any possible truth in these comments about MOBREAL, Corrêa’s writing suggest that the brilliancy he refers to could be seen not only in the Foundation’s results but also in his own attitudes and decisions.

In his admiration of his own work in MOBRAL, Corrêa went so far as to state that the Foundation “may become the champion of income redistribution for which it has been struggling in very concrete terms.” This would happen because “by giving more education to the poorer sections of the population, we [MOBRAL] are actually redistributing income” (O Mobral, épico e técnico, 1972, pp. 36-37). Wilson Abujanra, a literacy worker in São Paulo, seemed to agree with Corrêa, forecasting the end of the slums as a result of MOBRAL. He said that the *favela* residents “themselves were the cause of their inability and misery” because “without greater possibilities for gaining [formal] qualifications, they began to live in groups with minimal conditions of human survival.” For him, this situation would change with MOBRAL, considering that the Foundation would bring about “conscientisation of the community” regarding the social and economic problems surrounding illiteracy, and better integrate non-literates into society by helping them to become literate (O MOBRAL está libertando brasileiros, 1971, p. 34). It is worth noting the incoherence in Abujanra’s language, which employs terms from popular movements in education and culture in the 1960s, such as “conscientisation,” at the same time as it blames, at least partially, favela residents for their own poverty.

In Corrêa’s and Abujanra’s arguments, there is an inversion of logic about literacy and income distribution. For them, as for many others at that time, it was not that poverty restricted access to reading and writing instruction, but that unequal access to literacy education created a disparate distribution of wealth (Cunha & Góes, 1991). This type of discourse distorted reality by hiding the fact that the problem was actually rooted in the concentration of wealth among a few elites, which generated social injustices within society (Cunha & Góes, 1991). Additionally,

such discourse fails to comprehend that illiteracy is a result of structural inequalities and not a sign of laziness or lack of intelligence on the part of the non-literates (Freire, 1970/2005; 1985b; Freire & Macedo, 1987). To be non-literate in a literate society is almost never a choice but an imposition, a consequence of an unequal distribution of power that serves to perpetuate oppressive conditions.

Corrêa and Abujanra also fail to recognise that literacy in particular and education in general, by themselves, are not sufficient to change social structures and bring about a fairer distribution of income. They can, however, be a part of the change when they are focused on the humanisation of both students and teachers (Freire, 2001). As Freire explains, critical and “liberating” education “can change our understanding of reality. But this is not the same thing as changing reality itself. No. Only political action in society can make social transformations, not critical study in the classroom” (Freire, in Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 175). Furthermore, a critical perception of reality does not necessarily imply the disposition or even the desire to engage in transformative action. For one to act in meaningful revolutionary praxis, many virtues need to be developed, such as coherence, authenticity and solidarity (Freire, 2001).

In MOBREAL, teachers often worked in isolation and without much support from state and central commissions. Financial resources were scarce, and the pressures for high pass rates only added to an already difficult situation. The problems started with the conditions of the classrooms. The municipal commissions used any available space as classrooms, even if there was no adequate light source for night classes or enough tables and chairs for the students enrolled. A teacher named Antonia, for example, wrote from the countryside of Bahia to the central

commission asking for help because her students had to “write on the floor, [sitting] on mats almost in the dark, without clothes, without food, without a chair, without a table, without a chalkboard.” For her, the only “fun” the students could look forward to in their lives was “pulling the hoe year after year, working in the fields,” because “they work in the fields to eat, and when the harvest is done, all that is left [to them] is to die” (B. N. Souza, 2016, p. 124).

In many cases MOBRAL’s teachers felt themselves to be in a contradictory position, isolated and alone but at the same time controlled and without autonomy. In MOBRAL, there was a counter-intuitive intentionality in the selection of teachers, wherein the municipal commissions, in the words of the teacher Maria de Fátima, “did not want trained teachers, [you] had to be a student, preferably state school students, with the excuse they [the commissions] were giving an opportunity (...). We were volunteers at MOBRAL. We were not teachers; [but that is what] we called ourselves” (L. K. Gomes, 2012, p. 69). Indeed, MOBRAL President Arlindo Lopes Corrêa himself said that the Foundation’s teachers were semi-volunteers (CN/DSF, 18/11/1975, p. 7023). Implicit in these comments is the notion that, as unqualified teachers, the women were more likely both to follow MOBRAL’s guidelines and to accept unsatisfactory working conditions.

Maria de Fátima also complained that teachers and local supervisors were left without proper instruction about the programme and that only “the general coordinators received all the training (...). It was a transfer, they said: in this step here [of teaching], work with this [syllabic] family, in this one, do like this” (L. K. Gomes, 2012, p. 78). These comments suggest that an understanding of education as simply the transference of knowledge from one individual to another — what

Freire (1970/2005) criticises as a banking model — was woven not only into the relationship between teachers and students but also into that between teachers and coordinators. In such mechanistic environments, Freire (1970/2005, p. 124) argues, teachers and learners are prevented from being “masters of their own thinking.” Additionally, because criticism of any sort was discouraged in the Foundation’s programmes, some MOBREAL teachers did not feel comfortable analysing their own teaching practice. A teacher named Vera, for example, explained that “no one had the courage to speak, if you said this much, you [had to] quit the programme. Your job was tied to nothing” (L. K. Gomes, 2012, p. 78). Considering that job opportunities were limited, especially in small cities and in the countryside, the night shifts that teachers spent working in MOBREAL represented an important source of income, one that most likely could not be lost.

This does not mean that teachers all agreed about the adequacy of their salaries. In order to keep the same cost per student across the country, they were paid according to the number of students that attended their classes, not the number of hours they spent teaching or their previous qualifications. Some, like Maria Lúcia, felt that their earnings were fair. For her, “the money was good, I remember [that] it was like 70% of the [minimum] salary. It was not integral because I did not have a formal contract, [I] was not trained, I was even a minor” (L. K. Gomes, 2012, p. 73). Others, however, felt exploited. Maria Salete Matos Oliveira, for example, complained about her salary in a letter to the Central Commission. She wrote: “Look, I am going to stop teaching in MOBREAL because a literacy teacher earns almost nothing. Cr\$ 96.00 does not even pay the three or six kilometres that [I] walk at night, let alone to give the class” (B. N. Souza, 2016, p. 152). Teachers’

perceptions about their salaries were probably linked to geographic location, age and previous experience. Someone still in school, for example, would have a different response to one in the middle of their career; the same would likely be true of someone in the countryside in comparison with another working in an urban area.

The students themselves ranged in age from the young to the elderly, and included both men and women (B. N. Souza, 2016). Equally various as the backgrounds of the students were the meanings that they constructed from their experiences in MOBRAL. Some saw the classes as a way to have a better life, as did Antonio Luiz, who wished to join the navy after leaving MOBRAL (B. N. Souza, 2016, p. 141). Similarly, Oscarina said that she “wanted to study more and learn all the letters, to be a group servant, to clean the floor and to make snacks,” probably seeing in such service the guarantee of a regular income (A festa polpular do abc, 1971, p. 43). Others, even without any financial return from their newly learned reading and writing abilities, still felt satisfied with the programme. Joaquim, for example, explained that “the money is the same [after MOBRAL], but I do not hit my finger [use a finger print] to sign anymore, and I want to read everything that there is” (p. 43). In this way, and regardless of all its limitations, MOBRAL provided the possibility for some to leave behind the stigma attached to not knowing how to write their own names.

MOBRAL also had results that were not predicted or desired by those working in the Foundation. As Giroux’s interpretation of Freire shows, “power works both on and through people” (Giroux, 1985, p. xix). In this way, “domination is never so complete that power is experienced exclusively as a negative force” because power is also “at the basis of all forms of behavior in which people resist, struggle,

and fight for their image of a better world” (p. xix). Power, in this view, is “ubiquitous and is expressed in a range of oppositional public spaces and spheres that traditionally have been characterized by the *absence* of power and thus any form of resistance” (Giroux, 1985, p. xix).

One deviation of the original purpose of MOBRAL’s functional literacy programme can be seen in the three-page article *Os planos do Mobral aos três anos* (MOBRAL’s plans at the age of three years), published in *Veja* in 1973. After presenting the opinions of Mário Henrique Simonsen and Arlindo Lopes Corrêa about the “proven success” of MOBRAL and the expansion plans of the Foundation to field other than literacy learning (pp. 67; 69), the anonymous author focuses on MOBRAL’s activities in Alto Paraíso, a small city of the state of Goiás.

Figure 14: Mobral in Alto Paraíso, GO: the teacher and the three most assiduous students



Source: *Os planos do Mobral aos três anos* (1973, p. 70)

First, the teacher, Ruth Dalva Santos (Image 14, left corner), complains that with the low frequency of students “the five months established for literacy [learning] constitute an insufficient deadline in our conditions” (p. 70). Following these

comments, the three most assiduous students are introduced (Image 14, right corner): Jorgina Pereira dos Santos, Justina Pereira dos Santos and Martinha Pereira dos Santos. Their routines are carefully detailed: “during the day, with a pick and a hammer, [they] break crystal in the *garimpo*. In the evening, [they] attend the literacy course. Then [they] complete the day as prostitutes” (p. 70). The women mention the idea of having better living conditions as one of the reasons for attending MOBREAL. However, one of them, Jorgina Pereira dos Santos, adds that with the mastery of reading and writing “we will also stop annoying others when we need to write a love letter” (p. 70). In this way, despite the strong functional approach of MOBREAL, students found subtle ways of resisting and diverting the Foundation’s programme to their own purposes, in this case, one of learning how to write love letters.

6.3 The Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry and the literacy rate controversy

During its first years, MOBREAL was able to refute almost every criticism made against it, keeping a highly positive public image. Its aura of invulnerability, however, was shattered in 1975. On September 08, Senator João Calmon (ARENA, Espírito Santo) gave a speech congratulating MOBREAL on its anniversary and major achievements, as he had done many times before (CN/DSF, 09/09/1975, p. 4379-4389). Soon after he began talking, however, he introduced the controversial issue of pre-teen children attending MOBREAL’s short-courses for teenage and adult literacy learning. Calmon complained that although MOBREAL President Corrêa had been called before the Commission of Education and Culture in June to explain the presence of

children in MOBRAL, he never attended the meeting or offered any clarification of the matter. Minister of Education and Culture Ney Braga later assured the Commission that the Ministry had rejected all proposals to incorporate younger age groups in MOBRAL. Nevertheless, MOBRAL had ignored the directive from the Minister and signed agreements with the municipalities of Recife, Petrolina, Capoeiras and Jupi to teach literacy to children. This information caused considerable turmoil in the Senate, with strong arguments both for and against MOBRAL's so-called "Youth Programme" (CN/DSF, 09/09/1975, p. 4379-4389).

After Calmon's speech, a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry was established to investigate the programme, thereby putting literacy in the spot light on the national political stage and making it an important issue to be discussed. It is worth noting that neither the members of ARENA, the ruling party in government, nor those of the opposition MDB party were unanimous in their opinions about the Youth Programme. On the contrary, some senators from ARENA, such as João Calmon and Jarbas Passarinho, expected supporters of MOBRAL, actually criticised the Foundation and endorsed the investigation, while at least one of the senators from the mostly anti-MOBRAL MDB, namely Benjamin Farah, openly agreed with the expansion into the field of children's literacy learning and positioned himself against the inquiry.

Over the following days, a heated debate took place in the Senate. The arguments in favour of short courses for children highlighted the idea that, while not perfect, MOBRAL's abbreviated school experience was a

better option for children than the present situation of little or no formal education at all, as was particularly the case in the North and Northeast (Eurico Rezende, in CN/DSF, 09/09/1975, p. 4381). There was also the belief that MOBREAL should do whatever it could “in favor of education” for both adults and minors (Benjamin Farah, in CN/DSF, 24/09/1975, p. 4916). Those against the Youth Programme claimed that it fell far short of the constitutional obligation, still not implemented, of primary education for children between 7 and 14 years (João Calmon, in CN/DSF, 09/09/1975, p. 4381), and that, if instituted, it would likely further delay the universalisation of basic education, as many people would be satisfied with the offer of a couple of months formal education instead of the eight years of elementary education that children were entitled to (Flexa Ribeiro, in CN/DSF, 16/03/1976, p. 0343). There was also a pessimistic prediction that the option for short courses would exacerbate regional inequality in the country, as children from the more prosperous states in the South and Southeast would enjoy access to elementary education while those from the North and Northeast would have to accept just a few months of school (João Calmon, in CN/DSF, 09/09/1975, p. 4381).

The inquiry also brought to the surface a broader disagreement on whether adult literacy programmes or child literacy programmes would a better investment of government funds. Some stated that in adult education “the return is more accelerated” because the students were “already integrated into the labour force” (Vasconcelos Torres, in CN/DSF, 27/11/1975, p. 7462). Others, on the contrary, claimed that adults should not

receive the same support from the government as children because the expenditure with adults would be less profitable and because only children were protected by law (Flexa Ribeiro, in CN/DSF, 16/03/1976, p. 0374). This debate was quite narrowly focused, as it concentrating only on the possible financial return on investment, while disregarding the legal right to access education and ethical right to become more fully human of both children and adults.

Overall, the proceedings of the Committee were surrounded by protest, both public and internal. Committee President Gilvan Rocha (MDB - Sergipe) reported having received phone calls from members of the public complaining about the “inquisitorial and destructive nature” of the investigation (CN/DSF, 18/11/1975, p. 7002). Many municipal governments also sent telegrams to criticise the critical stance of the Senate regarding the enrolment of children in MOBRAL’s classes (CN/DSF, 18/11/1975, p. 7228). In addition many of ARENA’s senators felt that the Committee’s interviews ended up going beyond the original purpose of examining MOBRAL’s Youth Programme, discussing topics that could become sensitive for the government. The Committee’s proceedings, for example, describe internal conflicts between members of MOBRAL and the Ministry of Education and Culture, and present reports of “ghost” students and classrooms in the municipalities. The proceedings also put forward claims of wrongful purchase of goods without public bidding, and even report the manipulation of data regarding the number of students approved at the end of the courses. It was not unexpected, therefore, that in October the majority of the Committee, formed of ARENA senators, called for a vote to

disband the Committee and abandon the investigation after only a month of inquiry, instead of the three stipulated initially (CN/DSF, 15/11/1975, pp. 6964-6965; 09/03/1976, pp. 0120-0143).

The media closely followed the Senate depositions and arguments about MOBREAL. *Folha de São Paulo*, for example, published several articles about the inquiry from September 1975 to April 1976. The newspaper questioned the meaning of literacy and “how,” “why,” and “for what” people should learn how to read and write (Abramo, 1975, p. 26). The media coverage also challenged the “special immunities” that the Foundation had had until that moment within the government (Oposição diz que pretende fiscalizar ação do Mobral, 1976, p. 14). Finally, *Folha de São Paulo* exposed the fragility of the legislature itself, which failed to carry out the inquiry until the end (A Primeira Pedra, 1976, p. 2). The Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry, therefore, failed to provide a comprehensive analysis of MOBREAL’s activities. It did, however, foster a conversation about literacy and the balance of power between the Congress and the Executive.

Only three years after the inquiry, the validity of MOBREAL’s statistics was brought into question. In 1978, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) publicised the preliminary results of its most recent National Home Sampling Survey, which showed that the number of people without reading and writing abilities had increased between the years of 1973 and 1976. MOBREAL President Corrêa quickly dismissed the Survey, saying that “the results obtained by IBGE cannot be taken seriously” because they indicated that “the Brazilian education [system] would have regressed since 1973, with a setback in all parameters” (Dados

do Mobral são contestados no Piauí, 1978, p. 39). Euro Brandão, Minister of Education and Culture at that time, also dismissed the importance of the Survey, reasoning that “even if there is an error in our statistics [MOBRAL’s statistics], it is obvious [to me] that thousands of people are becoming literate annually” (Estatísticas do IBGE e do Mobral em debate, 1978, p. 17). In comments to the press, staff members of the Secretariat of Planning explained the conflict between the literacy rates as a difference in methodology, with MOBRAL considering everyone who attended its classes as literate, while IBGE had officers personally visiting households to collect information (Técnicos do IBGE e do MEC reuniram-se, 1978, p. 35).

In the press, the rise in the numbers of non-literate people was considered disturbing, particularly considering that over the same period (1973-1976) the gross domestic product of the country grew 26%. The clear irony in the statistics, with the rising of both the gross domestic product and the number of non-literates, led some journalists to question the priorities and investments of the government (Suplicy, 1978, p. 26). The 1980 Census confirmed illiteracy levels to be around 25.5% (IBGE, 1984, p. 75), a smaller percentage than in 1970 but still far distant from MOBRAL’s estimate of 5% to 10%. Furthermore, the absolute number of people without reading and writing abilities had continued to grow during the decade 1970-1980, with a rise of 569,870 (IBGE, 1984, p. 75). As a result of these data and the Senate inquiry, the public perception that, despite its problems, MOBRAL was still a viable initiative began to collapse.

The government subsequently repackaged MOBRAL to focus on the development of communities, even going so far as to criticise MOBRAL’s former

top-down hierarchy (Paiva, 1982). No longer an independent foundation but a government body incorporated inside the structure of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the new MOBREAL would target impoverished populations, concentrating its efforts on the expansion of childhood education. In this way, the Ministry could secure MOBREAL's resources for education, and the military government could avoid the criticism that would have arisen from completely terminating the Foundation (Paiva, 1982). The new MOBREAL, however, was short-lived. After the election of the first non-military president since 1964, it came to be considered a poor investment of government funds. In addition, it was perceived as an unwelcome legacy of the military regime. In 1985, therefore, MOBREAL was finally extinguished and its resources reallocated directly into the regular education system.

Over the years, MOBREAL has been perceived in various ways, first as a technocratic solution for illiteracy, then as a communitarian mobilisation for education with a perspective of social assistencialism, later, with the controversies about literacy rates, as a highly suspicious organisation, and finally, after the restoration of democracy, as an experience to be forgotten (B. N. Souza, 2016). In none of these various phases, however, was the humanisation of people a primary concern. On the contrary, MOBREAL's goals are best viewed within the context of Giroux's rejection of most literacy learning in the United States as being a misguided endeavour based on "either a functional perspective tied to narrowly conceived economic interests or to an ideology designed to initiate the poor, the underprivileged, and minorities into the logic of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition" (Giroux, 1987, p. 3).

It was never MOBRAL's intention to change the distribution of structural power in society, but simply to promote limited functional literacy learning among the working classes. As Lankshear explains, functional literacy usually "comprises a minimal, essentially negative, and passive state (...). Functional literacy equips the person to respond to outside demands and standards, to understand and follow. There is no suggestion here of leading, commanding, mastering, or controlling" (Lankshear, 1993, p. 94). MOBRAL intended only to adapt its students to an external and dominant logic, without much concern for the diversity of the students' experiences or their aspirations for the future, the expectation being that reading and writing abilities would help them perform better financially.

6.4 Conclusion

As Freire (1974/2013; 1985b) explains, illiteracy is often perceived as a disease to be cured by a civilising process, and those without reading and writing skills are consequently characterised as lost men and women needing salvation. This distorted perception of illiteracy and non-literates was broadly accepted in MOBRAL. This chapter has shown how MOBRAL was portrayed as a well-ordered and well-structured programme that would solve the problem of illiteracy in Brazil. Through an intensive self-promotion campaign and over-optimistic projections about the Foundation's impact on literacy rates, MOBRAL was able to sell the idea that a shared effort in literacy learning would both stimulate the economy and improve income distribution. However, while the advertising and publicity campaigns did foster a broad sense of mutual enthusiasm and responsibility for literacy learning, they also were used to justify low teacher salaries, since teachers

were presumed to be working for the country's greater good as much as for their own financial livelihood.

The classrooms, in many cases, did not provided the proper conditions for learning, lacking lighting, tables, chairs, and chalkboards. The learning environment was a mechanistic one, where the generative words learned were disconnected from the reality of the students' lives and even the relationship between teachers and coordinators was filled with authoritarianism. Nevertheless, it would be naive to assume that teachers and students always followed the prescriptions from the Central Commission. Much more likely, they found subtle ways to bend MOBREAL's objectives to their own purposes, as, for example, when students attended classes to learn how to write love letters.

Chapter 7

Literacy in the search for democracy and social justice

This chapter analyses some of the prevailing conceptions of literacy and illiteracy from the late 1970s to early 1980s and their relationship to the search for democracy and social justice in Brazil. First, I discuss the moves towards democracy during the final years of the military regime that came into power in the coup of 1964. I do this by focusing on four events, the Amnesty Law of 1979, the re-establishment of a multiparty system, the government of the first non-military president since the coup, and the proclamation of the new Constitution in 1988. Second, I explore the historical development of a deep-rooted prejudice against non-literate people in Brazil. Third, I examine the debate over the right of non-literate people to vote that took place during the political transition from the military government to the civil government.

7.1 The redemocratization process

From 1974 onwards, during the presidencies of Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) and João Figueiredo (1979-1985), there was a trend towards greater political openness in the military government. This process, however, was not necessarily aimed at the reestablishment of full democracy, but at the transformation of the authoritarian regime into a less conservative force (Codato, 2004). The transition combined old and new structures, intertwining distinct interests and practices

instead of breaking away with the military influence altogether (Kinzo, 2001). It is not unexpected, therefore, that the major crises during Geisel's and Figueiredo's governments were related to the confrontation between the presidents' efforts to maintain control over the transition and the attempts of those critical of the process — both civil and military — to influence it according to their own divergent interests (Codato, 2004). President Geisel, for example, acted to reprimand and punish both radical politicians who favoured greater redemocratization and conservative military personnel who opposed any giving over of power to civil authorities (Kinzo, 2001).

In 1974 press censorship was partially revoked (Kinzo, 2001), and the federal congressional and state assembly elections of that year were held with greater freedom (Fleischer, 1986). The economic growth of the country made members of the ARENA party confident that they would achieve positive results in the voting polls, even if there were a small increase in the numbers of MDB (A. Carvalho 2005; Fleischer, 1986). Nevertheless, MDB candidates were able to establish a direct dialogue with the people, abandoning long discourses in favour of clear objective messages (A. Carvalho 2012). They focused their criticism not only on the undemocratic practices of the regime but also on the social and economic problems that the people were experiencing, a perspective which resonated with the aspirations of human rights defenders, students, urban workers, and small farmers. MDB, for example, criticised the government's decision to expend large amounts of resources on construction works while the population starved (A. Carvalho, 2012). As a consequence, MDB made significant gains in the legislature, winning 16 of the 22 chairs up for dispute for the Senate, increasing its participation from 87 to 165 national deputies in the Chamber of Deputies, and securing a

majority in six State Assemblies (A. Carvalho, 2012; Fleischer, 1986).

The election results were not well received by the military regime, which subsequently adopted two measures to reassert its control over the transition process. First, the government, as a way to weaken the opposition contact with the broad public, implemented Law No. 6.339 in 1976, drastically reducing the air time that politicians could access on radio and television and severely restricted their choice of content (Brasil, 1976). Second, President Geisel used his executive authority to close the National Congress for two weeks in April 1977, thereby gaining the unilateral power to approve a series of reforms that favoured ARENA, both in the number of votes necessary to pass legislation in Congress and in the rules for the indirect election of governors, the next of which was due to occur in 1978 (Fleischer, 1986). These reforms created the strange figure of the ‘bionic’ senator — a name crafted by the public in reference to the TV Show *The Six Million Dollar Man* — meaning a senator who was appointed to his or her position rather than elected by the people (Chauí & Nogueira, 2007).

Despite these setbacks, new advances towards democracy were made on other fronts in the following years. Institutional Act No. 05, for example, was revoked in 1978, re-establishing the right of habeas corpus. In the same year, media outlets also changed their use of language, employing the word *coup* instead of *revolution* when describing the event that led to the establishment of military government in 1964. Further, in 1979 an amnesty law was approved, pardoning all persons who had committed political or electoral crimes during the military regime. The armed forces had insisted that the law include legal immunity for any of its members who had been involved in repressive acts against the opposition (A.

Carvalho, 2005), a demand which the opposition was predisposed to accept, knowing that only by doing so could it ensure the safety of those who had been arrested or had opted for exile after the coup (Araujo, 2014). This “reciprocal amnesty” fostered a feeling of resentment among the public as it did not hold the military accountable nor make visible the individuals who had been directly involved in the repressive apparatuses (A. Carvalho, 2005, p. 135).

Also in 1979, a multiparty system of government was re-established because the two-party system no longer benefited the military regime, which found itself in a “straightjacket” as the electorate increasingly voted against ARENA (Fleischer, 1986, p. 29). From a Freirean point of view, this change can be seen as part of a “divide and rule” strategy to break ties of solidarity within the oppressed and enforce competition among them (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 141). The ARENA party became the *Partido Democrático Social* – PDS (Social Democratic Party), and the opposition, which had been relatively unified against the dictatorship under the MDB Party, fragmented into five parties – the *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* – PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party), the *Partido Popular* – PP (Popular Party), the *Partido Democrático Trabalhista* – PDT (Democratic Labour Party), the *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro* – PTB (Brazilian Labour Party), and the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* – PT (Workers’ Party). The *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* – PCB (Brazilian Communist Party) and the *Partido Comunista do Brasil* – PC do B (Communist Party of Brazil) remained illegal (Ridenti, 2014).

In 1984 a large number of popular demonstrations took place around the country, some of them with more than a million participants. People went to the streets demanding direct presidential elections instead of the prevailing indirect and

undemocratic model in which only parliamentarians would vote (Bertoncello, 2009). This movement, known popularly as *Diretas Já* (Direct Elections Now), gave ordinary people a way to express their frustration with the oppressive political, economic, and social conditions in Brazil. In response, President Figueiredo sent a constitutional amendment to the National Congress that would grant additional power to the legislature but withhold the direct presidential vote until the next election (Bertoncello, 2009). Although the demonstrators, who wanted earlier direct elections, remained dissatisfied, Congress negotiated with the Executive to reach a compromise solution. This was done under the assumption of many in the opposition that it was better to secure a non-military government for 1985 and a direct election for president in 1989 than to gamble with the unpredictable behaviour of the more reactionary members of the military (Kinzo, 2001).

The supporters behind the candidacy of Tancredo Neves from PMDB, the largest party in opposition, did not have the necessary votes to secure his election as president (Kinzo, 2001). The government candidate, however, was unpopular even with many members of his own PDS party. Those who were dissatisfied formed a dissident group, founding the *Partido da Frente Liberal* - PFL (Liberal Front Party) and supporting Neves. To seal the alliance between PMDB and PFL, José Sarney, a senator who had a close relationship with the military regime, ran as Neves's vice-president (Kinzo, 2001). They won the indirect election in 1985, but one day before the inauguration Neves was hospitalised with a critical condition and died shortly after. As a result the Vice-President elect, Sarney, became President. However, this result did not represent an authentic victory for the opposition because Sarney had been a former ARENA member and supporter of the military

government. In the event, therefore, the ruling classes connected with the military were not actually replaced, but only reorganised (Codato, 2005). Many of the militarised practices of the regime also continued to exist as products of a “conservative political commitment” on the part of the new administration (A. Carvalho 2005, p. 166).

In 1987 a Constitutional Assembly was formed to write a new democratic constitution. The Assembly, made up of members of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, did not work from a pre-formulated draft provided by the Executive but developed the text in its entirety through the work of various commissions (M. T. Souza, 2003). Not surprisingly, the deliberations were covered by the press in length and were subjected to considerable political pressure from organised social activist groups (Kinzo, 2001). The Assembly did not accept all of the demands made upon it, but it did accept enough for the resulting new constitution to become widely known as a ‘citizen letter’ that ensured the preservation of welfare-state principles and encouraged freedom of speech by bringing about a definitive end to censorship. As Kinzo (2001) points out, the constitution also incorporated advances regarding the size of the social security network, the rights of workers and the measures employed against race and gender prejudice. The unequal distribution of land in the country, however, remained an unresolved matter, and the military kept the legal prerogative to intervene in political crisis if requested by the Executive, the Legislature or the Judiciary (Kinzo, 2001).

The Sarney administration experienced high rates of inflation, which helped fuel on-going disputes between the supporters of state-controlled national-development, on the one hand, and those who favoured a free-market neoliberal

ideology, on the other (Silveira, 2009). People in Latin American had already witnessed neoliberal experiments in Chile with Augusto Pinochet (1973) and in Argentina with Martinez de Hoz (1976). Elsewhere, the government of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom (1979-1990) and that of Ronald Reagan in the United States of America (1981-1989) enthusiastically endorsed the deregulation of national economies and the reduction of social expenditure worldwide. It was not surprising, therefore, that neoliberal initiatives for the dismissal of civil servants and the privatisation of state-owned companies were also proposed in Brazil. However, President Sarney remained in favour of greater government control over the economy, declaring a moratorium on external debt and announcing that Brazil's foreign loans would not be serviced to the detriment of the citizens' nutritional needs and employment (Silveira, 2009).

In 1989, people voted for a president for the first time since the military coup in the 1960s. The political culture of the country was changing, with a decrease in the strength of large parties like PDS, PMDB and PFL, and a proliferation of new small parties. Corruption was an important topic of the debates throughout the election campaign (Moisés, 1990). The dualisms between state and market and between national and international interests were also exacerbated (Sallum Jr., 1999). For most voters (around 70%) it was the first time that they could actually vote for a president (Moisés, 1990, p. 145). For many of them, however, it was less a matter of voting for a candidate than of voting in protest *against* political programmes that they disliked. Of the 21 candidates that ran for president in the first round of voting, the final two aspirants were the governor of Alagoas, Fernando Collor de Mello, and union leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. There was heavy use of

mass media, and the discourse between the Right and the Left was polarised. While Lula received a large number of votes in urban centres and even gained the majority in some state capitals, including Belo Horizonte, Fortaleza, Porto Alegre, Recife, Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, Collor de Mello performed better in small cities and the countryside and was elected with 53.01% of the valid votes (Moisés, 1990, p. 137). The inauguration of Collor de Mello as president symbolised the completion of the long process of political openness that had begun 15 years before (Kinzo, 2001), and that had involved re-establishing rights such as habeas corpus and freedom of the press, the writing of a new constitution, and the people's participation in a direct election for president.

7.2 The development of prejudice against non-literate people in Brazil

Literacy has been historically associated with an enduring series of myths such as that reading and writing foster “democratic practice”, “upward social mobility,” “economic development” and “individual transformation,” and that higher levels of literacy might even lead to a reduction in crime rates (Graff, 1979, 2011). The mythological narratives of literacy also tend to see literacy acquisition as associated with intrinsic values, for example, learning how to read and write is inherently good. Additionally, any possible failure to learn is pointed out to be related to the individual's lack of ability or effort rather than connected to any condition of their social environment (Graff, 1979, 2011).

As with literacy, illiteracy is also associated with a series of myths. In Brazil, for example, it is possible to see non-literate people being characterised as uncritical and incapable. In this way, as both Ferraro (2009) and Galvão and Di

Pierro (2007) claim, illiteracy constitutes a social stigma that reduces people's political ability to act on their own behalf. However, this was not always the case in Brazil. For several centuries after the start of colonisation, the ability to read and write was much more connected with the urban middle class than with the ruling classes formed by large land owners (Galvão & Di Pierro, 2007). It was only in the 19th century that a lack of reading and writing skills came to signify poverty and ignorance (Galvão & Di Pierro, 2007).

An important part of this change was the electoral reform, approved in 1881, which denied voting rights to non-literates (Ferraro, 2009; Galvão & Di Pierro, 2007). The reform came into effect during the decline of the Brazilian imperial political system. Up to that time, elections had been held indirectly, with the electorate group formed only of men who met minimum income standards. The congress rejected the first proposal for reform, submitted by Viscount of Simbu in 1878 (Ferraro, 2009). A second proposal was presented by José Antônio Saraiva in 1880 and approved a year later. The debates surrounding these proposals focused on whether those without the mastery of written language should be able to vote. Some politicians, such as José Bonifácio, argued that Brazil did not have enough schools and that therefore excluding people based on reading and writing abilities was unfair. Others, like Franklin Dória, stated that non-literate persons were barely able to attend to their private business and therefore lacked the capacity to be involved in the public sector. In the end, the view of politicians like Dória prevailed, and the final version of the law denied voting rights to all those who did not know how to read and write (Ferraro, 2009).

From a Freirean perspective, the electoral reform exemplified four oppressive characteristics of Brazilian society. First, it brought to light the deep colonial nature of the relationship between politicians and the people, one which was even more perverse for those with little to no economic power and those with brown or black skin colour. The decision to exclude non-literates from voting showed an authoritarian and anti-dialogical way of understanding decision-making processes. It also denied the possibility of there being any relevant knowledge outside of the written language, while at the same time dramatically reducing the possibilities for those not engaged with literate culture to generate change. Employing Freire's terms, the reform converted non-literates into "beings for others," frustrating their ontological vocation of "being more" (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 74; 44).

Second, the reform can be seen as a type of "cultural invasion," working both as "an *instrument* of domination" and as "the *result* of domination" (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 154). As an instrument of domination, it perpetuated myths of "people's incompetence" and lack of knowledge (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 44). It reinforced a double consciousness within non-literates, of themselves and their oppressors. They became habituated to believe that there were qualified "experts" to deal with the important decisions of the country, and that they should remain in silence and only follow external instructions. Furthermore, denying voting rights to non-literates deepened their insecurities and fear of autonomy as, being legally forbidden to have their say in the election of their political leaders, they were forced into believing that they lacked the necessary critical abilities to decide for themselves.

Third, the reform created a context of denied praxis. As Roberts points out, “to prevent someone from engaging in praxis – either through limiting the range of possible actions open to that person, or through inhibiting his or her ability to think critically – is to dehumanize that person” (Roberts, 1998, p. 107). When non-literates are denied voting rights, they are also dehumanised, because they are prohibited from critically reflecting on their lives and acting to bring about change. Additionally, if, as Freire argues, it is “in making decisions that we learn to decide” (Freire, 2001, p. 97), non-literates are also prohibited from joining a learning process. For them, there is no chance to learn by participating in Brazilian democratic processes.

Finally, the fourth oppressive characteristic of the reform is to be found in the reinforcement of a fatalistic ideology. As Freire explains, “one of the worst evils done to us in Brazil by the constituted authorities ever since the foundation of our society is to force us into a fatalistic and cynical indifference, born of existential weariness” (Freire, 2001, pp. 64-65). The idea that “things are the way they are because they cannot be otherwise” (Freire, 2000, p. 36) fosters the perception that the future is inevitable. If the unequal distribution of power in society in any given time is continuously perpetuated, there is no purpose in struggling to build different tomorrows. On the contrary, the only options are obedience and resignation. Fatalism combined with fear of freedom produces what might seem to be a passive attitude towards life but is actually the result of a profoundly oppressive condition, where people are prevented from fulfilling their ontological vocation.

The dehumanisation process of non-literate people, made clear through law during the electoral reform of 1880s, continued to develop during the 20th century. After the 1920s, the government established the first programmes focused on

“fighting” illiteracy, with literacy learning complemented by instruction in hygiene, a combination that indirectly associated non-literates with dirtiness (Klein, 2000). By the end of the 1940s, in addition to the primary and secondary levels, an “Education for Youth and Adults” level was implemented to reach those who had grown up without proper access to formal schooling. This took place in a context where people without reading and writing abilities were being publicly blamed for the difficult economic and social conditions that the country was enduring at the time (Klein, 2000). During the 1960s, rapid industrialisation further increased the pressures for literacy learning.

By the 1970s, the urban population had surpassed that of the rural areas for the first time. An important consequence of the shift to cities was that reading and writing became an even more central part of people’s daily lives. The common perception at the time was that those without a mastery of the written language were masses of “unexplored potential” that could be compared, in the words of Federal Deputy Flexa Ribeiro, to “moderns slaves” who were “buried in the basement of ignorance” (CN/DSF, suplemento, 28/07/1971, p. 53). In the National Congress, for example, the high rates of illiteracy were seen variously as a “stain”, a “terrible indicator of underdevelopment”, a “national shame”, and a “plague” to be exterminated (CN/DSF, 22/03/1973, p. 0180; 07/09/1974, p. 3598).

7.3 The right to vote of non-literates

When slavery finally came to an end in 1871, after almost four hundred years of oppression and transatlantic traffic in Brazil, there were no widespread programmes for providing formal education to former slaves and their children. On the contrary, the instruments of control of this population included limiting access to

the written culture as well as restricting freedom of movement and religious freedom (Menezes, 2003). Although the first republican constitution, enacted in 1891, maintained some of the previous voting restrictions, denying, for example, voting rights to women and non-literate people, it dropped the requirement of a minimum income to be a voter in Brazil. This change, at first glance a liberal measure to achieve universal suffrage (of men), still prevented the vast majority of people from participating in the elections. Women, for example, remained without voting rights until 1932, while non-literates had their rights continuously denied throughout most of the 20th century.

Although both the Left and the Right brought forward several proposals for universal suffrage in the 1960s and 1970s, they all failed (Aleixo, 1983). One by President João Goulart, for example, never got as far as a vote, while another by Castelo Branco was dismissed as “pessimistic” for its implicit assumption that the problem of illiteracy could never be solved (Petrônio é favorável à coincidência das eleições, 1976, p. 5), and was voted down. Not until the passage of a constitutional amendment in 1985 did non-literate people finally receive the right to vote, and even this discussion in Congress came under attack as a “setback” that might encourage illiteracy in an age when humanity had already landed on the moon (CN/DCN, 12/04/1985, p. 0531).

In fact, the vote of non-literate people was considered a threat across the political spectrum, with members on the left joining the right in opposing it. During the struggle to re-establish political democracy in the final years of the military dictatorship, for example, one leftist politician argued that “the illiterate will be an easy instrument to be deceived in their good faith and in their ignorance by the

instruments of coercion of the Government” (Celso Barros, in CN/DCN, 28/10/1977, p. 2928). This quote shows the incoherent behaviour of many politicians in Brazil, who, while proclaiming the virtues and benefits of democracy, also engage in anti-democratic practices. As Freire explains, “coherent democratic authority recognizes the ethical basis of our presence in the world and necessarily recognizes that it is not possible to live ethically without freedom and that there is no such thing as freedom without risk” (Freire, 2001, p. 87). Barros’s comments also show how some on the left were complicit in what Freire describes as “an unjustified lack of faith in people, an underestimation of their power of reflection, of their ability to take on the true role of seekers of knowledge” (Freire 1974/2013, p. 104). These politicians’ distrust of people’s capacity to critically evaluate the world was larger than their disposition to dialogue.

This attitude is characteristic of authoritarian discourse, where people are seen only as objects to be acted upon by a better-informed and more capable vanguard rather than as critical and creative subjects of their own lives. The reasoning behind Barros’s argument is that the left should first gain control of the country and only then be open to listening to people’s voices and demands. He and many others were unable to realise, as Freire did, that “because liberating action is dialogical in nature, dialogue cannot be *a posteriori* to that action, but must be concomitant with it. And since liberation must be a permanent condition, dialogue becomes a *continuing* aspect of liberating action” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 139). Again, the need to conquer and control suppressed any move towards a more dialogical action.

Some of the arguments held against the vote presented a reductionist, mechanical view of literacy and education. One member of Congress claimed that if the literacy criteria were dropped, mayors in the countryside would decrease municipal funds for schooling as they would not need literate voters to be elected (Aderbal Jurema, in CN/DSF, 27/05/1982, p. 1871). Another warned that non-literate people would lose interest in learning how to read and write if allowed to vote (Adail Vettorazzo, in Congresso Nacional, Diários do Congresso Nacional [CN/DCN], 12/04/1985, p. 0540). The reasoning behind this idea of withholding rights from non-literate people as a means to encourage literacy learning resembles some of the methods around MOBRAL, where targeted policies were drafted, for example, to prevent non-literates from entering the public service (*Analfabeto não pode ser servidor*, 1972, p. 24) and from obtaining professional registration cards which would grant them access to social security benefits (*Superdotados terão comissão especial*, 1973, p. 8; *Repudiada assinatura com o polegar*, 1973, p. 12).

Another aspect shared with MOBRAL was the recommendation of simplistic answers to the complex problem of illiteracy. For some politicians in the 1980s, there was no reason to grant the vote to non-literate people because if the government truly committed itself to achieving a “solution” to the problem and organising a plan to “effectively eradicate illiteracy,” the whole population would know how to read and write in less than a year (Adail Vettorazzo, in CN/DCN, 12/04/1985, p. 0540). Once again, therefore, as in MOBRAL in the decade before, illiteracy was seen as a neutral and technical matter, something to be solved with the right methodology. This view fails to acknowledge that “illiteracy is not in itself the original obstacle. It’s the result of an earlier hindrance and later becomes an

obstacle. No one elects to be illiterate. One is illiterate because of objective conditions” (Freire, 1985b, p. 13). The material conditions that generated illiteracy, therefore, are intrinsically connected to relations of exploitation and cannot be overcome with a fast a-political fix or a new learning methodology.

The most frequent argument against giving the vote to non-literate people, however, was their alleged technical and ethical limitations. They would not have the same understanding of the world as those with a mastery of the written language, and lacked perspective and the capacity to prioritise long-term projects over their own immediate interests (Veto ao voto, 1980, p. 4). Non-literates would also be more likely to be motivated by “good faith” and vote out of gratitude instead of carefully evaluating the lives and deeds of the candidates (Heitor Dias, in CN/DCN, 28/10/1977, p. 2930). Additionally, there was the notion that “voting presupposes a minimum of knowledge, a minimum of participation in cultural values” and that people without reading and writing skills would lack such “fundamental self-consciousness” (Miguel Reale, in CN/DCN, 15/09/1984, p. 2120).

When analysed through a Freirean’s lens, it can be seen that all these arguments generated a process of dehumanization of non-literates. First, they reinforced a profound dichotomy between non-literates and literates, as if they were groups with entirely different characteristics. On one hand, non-literate people were regarded as uncritical, easily manipulated and incapable of deciding the country’s future. On the other hand, reading and writing abilities were portrayed as solid shields against ignorance and misconduct, almost as if the written word gifted literates with wise and ethical behaviour. In this respect such arguments conform to Freire’s observation that in most cases of adult literacy learning the knowledge and

experience of non-literate people are dismissed (Freire, 1985b, p. 8). Second, the arguments are based on an understanding of culture narrowly defined as the preferences and practices of the dominant classes. From a broader Freirean perspective, however, culture is the result of human activity that is “in the world and with the world” and transforms reality through dialogue and work in a creative way (Freire, 1974/2013, p. 59). It is also “the representation of lived experiences, material artifacts, and practices forged within the unequal and dialectical relations that different groups establish within a given society at a particular point in historical time” (Giroux, 1985, p. xxi). Therefore, the argument that non-literates should not vote because they lacked “cultural values” can be seen as one of the strategies of the ruling classes to maintain unchanged the balance of structural power within society.

Those in favour of universal suffrage highlighted historical and social grounds as motives to modify the existing legislation. It was noted that the inadequate number of schools and the difficulties in gaining access to formal education contributed heavily to the high levels of illiteracy in the country (Ruy Bacelar et al., in CN/DCN, 26/08/1977, p. 2080). They also tried to show that non-literates should not be punished for a situation they had little to no control over and was to a great extent the result of the systematic inefficiency and even unwillingness of the Brazilian government. It was further pointed out that the broad circulation of news made possible through radio and television was a form of popularisation of information and opinion available to the whole population — one that was independent of written language (Ruy Bacelar et al., in CN/DCN, 26/08/1977, pp. 2079-2081; Joel Ribeiro et al., in CN/DCN, 09/08/1980, pp. 1815-1816). The claim

that non-literates had greater intellectual limitations than literates was interpreted as a strategy of deception to deny voting rights to the former, as the political and ethical problems related to the vote of both non-literates and literates were similar (Voto do analfabeto, 1980, p. 2).

One journalist noted the fact that while non-literates were criticised for their lack of reading and writing abilities, many simplistic and “pre-fabricated” discourses of politicians were accepted and praised (Portella, 1982, p. 3). This contradiction in the attitudes of many politicians and members of the public was the result of their projecting ignorance onto non-literates without ever perceiving their own flaws and limitations. The contradiction can also be traced to one “Brazilian tradition” where the norm “has not been to exchange ideas, but to dictate them; not to debate or discuss themes, but to give lectures” (Freire 1974/2013, p. 34). Those people, immersed in their arrogance and self-assurance, completely overlooked the valuable knowledge that non-literates could contribute to discussions about the future of the country.

The history of racial oppression in Brazil was another matter brought up for discussion when Federal Deputy and civil rights activist Abdias do Nascimento pointed out that the literacy criteria for voting stripped former slaves of their citizenship rights and exposed the “racist tradition of our [republican] Constitutions” (CN/DCN, 15/09/1984, p. 2119). The quantitative impact of the literacy criteria can be inferred from census data, where in 1980, for example, only 52.65% and 52.45% of those over five years old who self-identified as black and brown, respectively, declared knowing how to read and write, while 74.85% of those who self-identified as white did the same (Menezes, 2003, p. 39). Considering that for the same year

the black and brown populations together represented 44.8% of the total inhabitants (Reis, 2007, p. 94), it is clear that a large number of the country's citizens were prohibited from exercising one of the most basic rights of democracy: that of voting for one's political leaders.

The insistence on maintaining a literacy criteria for determining voting rights can be perceived as a means to bar from the polls those that the dominant classes considered to be undesirable, either because of their different political interests or their distinct cultural and historical experiences. Denying voting rights to non-literates, in other words, created a situation of political and social exclusion based both on class, as those with fewer economic resources have less access to schooling, and on race, given that black and brown populations have historically the lowest literacy rates in the country. This exclusion can be traced to what Freire defined as a "culture of silence," where systems of relationships built upon a colonial model of domination provide the basis for keeping people voiceless (Freire, 1985b; Osowski, 2008).

Denying the vote to non-literates affected their capacity to become agents of change in society. First, in a practical sense, as the vote can be used as an instrument of pressure to push for political and economic transformation, without it non-literates were seriously disadvantaged in these respects. Congressman Oswaldo Lima Filho, for example, noted the connection between the rejection of non-literates voting rights and the perpetuation of illiteracy, where "if they [non-literates] had the right to vote a long time ago, more than a hundred years ago, from the Republic, they would have guaranteed their children's education" (CN/DCN, 07/05/1985, p. 0701). Additionally, some in the media identified in the non-literate

vote a positive force capable of redressing the imbalance of political power and creating a fairer income redistribution (Portella, 1982, p. 3). Second, in a subjective, Freirean sense, being continually reminded that one lacks the ability to participate in the political process undermines one's confidence and "domesticates" one's consciousness (Freire, 1970/2005). Thus, non-literates share what Freire calls "the consciousness of the oppressed," which is to say the consciousness of those who have "historically had the duty to only listen and obey" and consequently "are influenced by the myth of their own ignorance" (Freire 1974/2013, p. 106). In this way, non-literates struggle to believe in themselves as active subjects capable of reshaping society.

It took over a hundred years after the electoral reform of 1881 for literacy to be removed as a criteria for voting. This happened through a constitutional amendment in 1985, which was later reaffirmed in the text of the new constitution in 1988. The new legislation made voting compulsory for literate Brazilians between eighteen and seventy years of age, and optional for those between sixteen and eighteen years, those over seventy years, and all non-literates over sixteen (Sobreira, 2008, p. 53). Despite receiving the right to vote, however, non-literates were denied the right to be elected to public office. Over the 1970s and 1980s many in Congress argued in favour of full political rights for non-literates, with members pointing out, for instance, the distortion of the principles of equality inherent in maintaining such double standard (Celso Barros, Humberto Lucena, & Cunha Lima, in CN/DCN, 28/10/1977, p. 2932), and another noting the valuable contribution that non-literates could offer to the country as office-holders (Matheus Schmidt, in CN/DCN, suplemento, 30/11/1985, p. 005). Nevertheless, the prevailing assumption

was that granting non-literates the right to be elected to the legislature or the executive would create a “republic of illiterates” (Marcondes Pereira, in CN/DCN, 12/04/1985, p. 0531) and undermine the morale of politicians (Adail Vettorazzo, in CN/DCN, 12/04/1985, p. 0535).

Granting voting rights to non-literate people, even in the limited terms outlined in the new constitutional legislation, also created a backlash in the media, with readers sending in letters to complain about the change. One reader, Luiz Gonzaga de Oliveira Filho, felt that granting voting rights to non-literates was a “regrettable” decision by Congress (Analfabetos, 1985, p. 12), while another, Valdir Donizeth Zanetoni, described the new law as a “joke” made to “fabricate votes and voters who were unaware of the reality of the country” (O voto do analfabeto, 1985, p. 3). Finally, another reader, Ganymédes José S. de Oliveira, was outraged because politicians had yielded the right to possess a voter registration card “to any illiterate” (O voto do analfabeto, 1985, p. 3). The disapproval of voting rights for non-literates shown by some members of the public is part of what Freire terms a “strange” view of democracy, one in which democracy is “more ‘pure’ and ‘perfect’ (...) to the degree that fewer people participate in it” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 45). In this paradoxical misperception, “democracy” becomes a caricature of the real thing, and democratic decision-making remains confined to empty discourse rather than being part of a meaningful praxis.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the long and difficult process of achieving political openness in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s. The road towards democracy was filled with small advances and various setbacks. The re-establishment of rights such

as habeas corpus and freedom of the press, the return of a regular schedule for direct elections and the enactment of a constitution with progressive tones placed Brazil on the path of building a more participative and fair society. Elitist and authoritarian traditions, however, remained. The new democracy, mainly framed as the right to vote for political leaders, offered few opportunities for direct consultation of the population for new laws or initiatives. Furthermore, a significant part of the population continued to be dehumanised by hunger, unemployment, a lack of basic public services, unconscious oppression and even physical violence.

Public discourse frequently ignored the premise that “democracy and democratic education are founded on faith in men [and women], on the belief that they not only can but should discuss the problems of their country, of their continent, their world, their work, the problem of democracy itself” (Freire 1974/2013, p. 34). Often, even those working to end the military regime demonstrated incoherent behaviour, a mismatch between their words and their actions. Both the notion that mistakes are integral to the process of developing autonomy and creating alternative outcomes (Freire, 2014) and the idea that only by deciding can people learn to decide (Freire, 2001) were disregarded when they should have been reaffirmed.

Displaying an authoritarian way of seeing the world, many politicians and members of the public attempted to withhold voting rights from non-literates. They saw the written language as a sacred shield against ignorance, as if being literate made one necessarily more wise and less prone to acts of corruption than those who were unable to read and write. Whether intentional or not, these attitudes reinforced both a culture of silence and a fatalistic perception of reality among non-

literates. They also created a context of denied praxis by restricting the right to say one's word about the world to a few instead of granting it to the whole population. In the end, non-literates gained their right to vote, but not the right to be elected to public office. Although this half-measure can be seen as an essential step towards the development of autonomy, it is still not enough if the goal is to build an inclusive and coherent democracy.

Final remarks and thoughts for the future

This thesis has provided a historical and philosophical analysis of the politics of literacy in Brazil between the years 1971 and 1989. From a Freirean framework, I have examined prevailing conceptions of literacy and illiteracy to understand their reasons for being and their relationships with the distribution of structural power within society. For this purpose, I cross-referenced documents of different types and origin, such as the Official Gazettes of the Federal Senate, the Official Gazettes of the Joint Sessions between the Federal Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, the reports of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, government publications and legislation, and articles from the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper and *Veja* magazine. I did this to achieve a more systematic understanding of the political dimensions of literacy than I would have achieved if I had focused only on documents from the government or from the printed press.

In these chapters, I have argued that a broad process of dehumanization of children, teenagers and adults took place in the authoritarian context of the military dictatorship. This process involved students, teachers, parents, members of the press, and members of Congress. Illiteracy and functional literacy were both used as instruments in the politics of literacy to maintain the unequal balance of structural power in Brazilian society. Widespread anti-dialogical actions fostered a culture of silence, a fatalistic ideology, and a fear of freedom. Such actions, although strengthened by the absence of democratic discussion in the period, also had deeper roots in a colonial way of seeing the world and a perverse need to conquer and dominate others, both of which were heavily present.

Literacy gained a more central role in people's daily routines as urbanization and industrialization took place in Brazil. The levels of illiteracy, however, continued to be significant, with more than 30% of people over 15 years old in 1970 declaring that they did not know how to read and write. Reading and writing abilities were not evenly spread in society, as groups with a particular class, skin colour, and geographic location presented significant higher rates of illiteracy. Non-literates, already associated with ignorance and poverty since the 19th century, were commonly seen as people without any meaningful culture or knowledge. They were denied their ontological and historical vocations in multiple ways. People who reached their adolescence without reading and writing skills either had no access to schooling or were forced to leave by the subtle practices of "school expulsion." For their lack of formal education, they were more exposed to economic exploitation and forced into relationships of domination and dependence. Members of the press and of the congress readily blamed them for the social and economic problems of the country. They were also deprived of their voting rights, with the Brazilian state legally silencing their voices.

Literacy learners faced practices of false generosity and even cultural invasion. Under the psychological approaches to learning how to read and write, children from the working classes were criticised for their alleged lack of "maturity" or "readiness." Their syntax and culture were completely disregarded, with a view that schools and teachers would save them from "cultural marginalisation" by teaching them a better way of being. The mechanistic approach to reading and writing employed at MOBREAL's classrooms constituted a clear example of Freire's "banking education," where neither students nor teachers had genuine autonomy

over the learning process. MOBREAL's focus was one of adapting teenagers and adults to external market-oriented demands, rather than of providing opportunities for students to reflect about the world.

The results of this investigation offer many possibilities for further research. While the documental sources consulted here provide a macro view of the politics of literacy, other approaches could be explored. Documents such as textbooks, students' notebooks, and teachers' files could be investigated to develop a more in-depth understanding of curricula and classroom practices. Another option could be the use of interviews and oral history, where the voices of students and teachers would receive greater emphasis. Extending the timeline of this thesis, it would also be pertinent to study if and how the dominant paradigm in literacy learning during the 1990s – the psychogenesis of written language – served neoliberal interests. Finally, a helpful research focus might be the new ways in which the notion of “cultural marginalisation” is present in current educational programmes in Brazil.

When researching the past, we always carry current anxieties and expectations with ourselves, making the study as much about the present as it is about the past (Le Goff, 2003). In my experience over the last three years, the threads from the past have connected many times with the fabric from the present. While I have been writing this thesis, Brazilians have once more been experiencing a difficult period in their history. An elected president, Dilma Rousseff, has been deposed without due process. A young black gay councilwoman, Marielle Franco, has been murdered for voicing her concerns about police abuses in poor communities. Teachers have been physically and verbally assaulted by state operatives while trying to defend their rights. Many are working to reformulate in a

positive light the memory of the dictatorship, calling for a new military intervention. Many others are attempting to implement a project named “School Without a Party,” which supports a neutral view of education against the “indoctrination” of students by ill-intentioned (also identified as leftist) teachers⁹. The ties between what had happened during the military dictatorship and what is happening now in Brazil are numerous.

I have not attempted to write the definitive truth about literacy in Brazil, but I believe that I have developed a comprehensive explanation for the most relevant factors that shaped and gave meaning to the politics of literacy during the 1970s and 1980s. However, denouncing the dehumanisation of people is almost never enough; we also need to announce new dreams in order to fight for a more fair and just future. As Freire has pointed out, “we should assume a committed attitude toward our theme, an attitude of one who does not want merely to describe what goes on as it happens. We want, above all, to transform the real world of our theme” (Freire, 1985b, p. 112). Following his words of encouragement, I would like to engage in the process of imagining a “not yet” future for Brazil.

First, I wish that Brazilians, especially those in positions of power, would break from authoritarian and undemocratic traditions and perceive the whole population as subjects and not mere objects of policies. Important steps to achieve this goal involve us believing in the abilities of others to understand their world while still recognising our own unfinishedness. Second, I wish that we, as a country, would implement a politics of literacy in favour of *conscientização*, which genuinely connects the word with the world, respecting and valuing people’s stories, culture

⁹ To know more about the project “School Without a Party,” see the critical analyses developed by Frigotto (2017) and Miguel (2016).

and knowledge. My final wish is that a hopeful language would be revitalised, where adopting a critical stand does not mean necessarily abandoning the possibility of dreaming. These three aspirations still pose a serious challenge to contemporary Brazil, a fact that reinforces the relevance of Freire's call for continuous critical reflection and action. However, I hope that through my research I have contributed to the process of critically understanding the past and formulating our "different tomorrows" (Freire, 2000, p. 55).

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